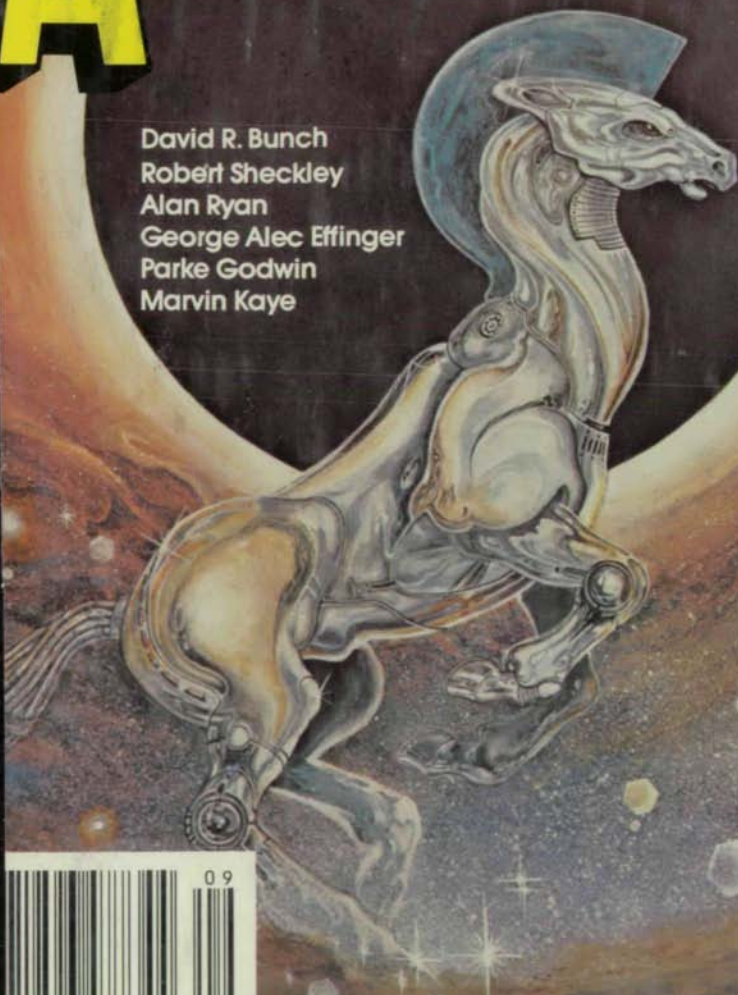


# AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

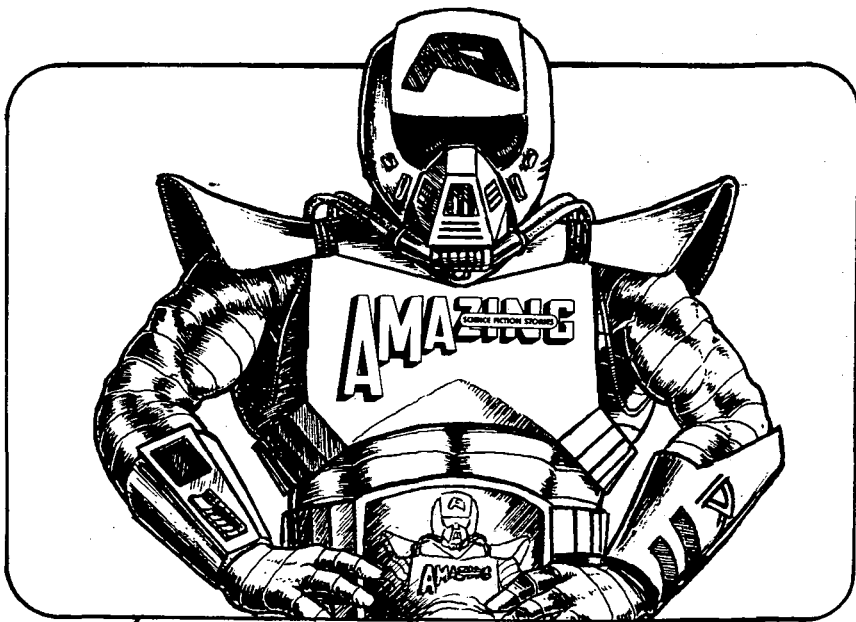
Founded in 1926 by  
Hugo Gernsback

David R. Bunch  
Robert Sheckley  
Alan Ryan  
George Alec Effinger  
Parke Godwin  
Marvin Kaye



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DELL  
HARRIS



**Be a hero ——— subscribe!**

**AMAZING Science Fiction Stories**  
**P.O. Box 110**  
**Lake Geneva WI 53147**

I feel heroic. Here's my money. ☐ \$9 (one year) ☐ \$16 (two years)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City

\_\_\_\_\_  
State

\_\_\_\_\_  
ZIP

*Outside U.S. and Canada: \$15 for one year (6 issues), \$28 for two years (12 issues)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# An open letter...

## to readers of AMAZING™ Science Fiction Stories

This, the September 1982 issue of AMAZING, marks the first issue of record of a new publisher. While about our only influence on this issue is the page you're reading, we hope you'll give us the opportunity in coming issues to show you a rebirth of the world's very first science fiction magazine.

George Scithers, formerly editor of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, is the new editor of AMAZING. In George's corner will be the resources of Dragon Publishing, a division of TSR Hobbies, Inc., the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® people. Together, we hope to bring to you speculative fiction in the tradition of AMAZING's founder, Hugo Gernsback.

We hope you've enjoyed AMAZING in the past, and we also hope you'll stay with us for what looks like a bright future. After all, how many other magazines can boast having both George and the Dragon?...

**Publisher:**

Jake Jaquet

**Editor:**

George Scithers



## —Editorial

IS IT SICK to fall in love with a magazine?

One night, a bit exhausted from too little time and too much to do, I held *Amazing* in my hand—a small piece of pulp sprinkled with printer's ink. Was it worth the struggle?

Neither money nor fame were keeping us going here in Scottsdale.

But somehow we had fallen in love with the idea of *Amazing*. And yes, it was worth it.

For a relatively solitary, long-distance business, this work was swarming with people. People whose minds I got into and came to know, for the most part without ever getting to meet them. I had to be very careful with that. I also figured it out that it was my responsibility to collect the most pertinent and entertaining of these voices into a package that would, in turn, get into the reader's heads—and hearts: I wanted the audience to get emotionally involved, too. Even if we disagreed, we would all care. This kind of communication would *make a difference*.

If small magazines like *Amazing* are dying out, as some would have us believe, it falls in line with the encroachment of the Big, Slick and Homogenized that threatens inquiring minds while numbing and comforting those who are afraid or maybe just too lazy to think.

There must remain a place for expression of fresh viewpoints, experimental writing styles and a full range of fantasy storytelling forms. A place where new voices can always be heard, along with older, more seasoned ones.

This has been *Amazing*. I hope it always will be.

Most sincere thanks go to all the people, great and not-yet-great, who worked so enthusiastically with us over the past three and one-half years keeping *Amazing* a thriving literary and artistic package.

And our very best wishes go to the new publisher, Jake Jacquet, and editor, George Scithers, for bigger and better days for our oldest science fiction magazine.

—Elinor Mavor  
Editor

*Memo to Hugo Gernsback:*

*Don't worry about my successors! Gygax, Jacquet and Scithers have what it takes!*

— Arthur Bernhard

**Arthur Bernhard**  
**Publisher**  
**Elinor Mavor**  
**Editor/Art Director**  
**Richard Rouse**  
**Assistant to Editor**  
**W.L. Thomsen**  
**Circulation Manager**

AMAZING™ Science Fiction Stories combined with FANTASTIC™ Stories, Volume 28 Number 7, September 1982. AMAZING Stories (ISSN 0279-6848) is published bi-monthly by Dragon Publishing, a division of TSR Hobbies, Inc., P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147. Single copy price: \$1.50 plus 50 cents postage and handling. Subscription rates: \$9 for 6 issues (one year) or \$16 for 12 issues (two years) sent to U.S. or Canadian addresses; in all other countries, subscription rates are \$15 for 6 issues or \$28 for 12 issues. Subscriptions must be paid for in advance in U.S. funds.

AMAZING Stories welcomes unsolicited submissions of written material and artwork; however, no responsibility for such submissions can be assumed by the publisher in any event. Any submission accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope of sufficient size will be returned to the contributor if it cannot be published.

AMAZING™ Science Fiction Stories and FANTASTIC™ Stories are trademarks applied for by TSR Hobbies, Inc. AMAZING Stories ©1982 TSR Hobbies, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. Second class postage paid at Lake Geneva, Wis., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Dragon Publishing, P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147.





combined with Fantastic ©

# AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

September, 1982

Cover Illustration: Dell Harris

Opinion • **6**  
Robert Silverberg

Book Reviews • **9**  
Tom Stalcar

Letters • **12**

Interview • **20**  
Brad Linaweaver  
William Alan Ritch  
*a conversation with  
Pulitzer Prize winning  
author Michael Shaara*



Wintermind • **28**  
Marvin Kaye  
Parke Godwin

The Royal Annie • **58**  
George Alec Effinger

Flyer • **68**  
John Steakley



Geometry of the Blues • **82**  
Wally Coins

Beside Still Waters • **96**  
Robert Sheckley

Gestures • **101**  
Alan Ryan

Writer's Workshop • **126**  
David R. Bunch

Random Thoughts

Scott E. Green  
James Patrick Kelly  
John D. Seats  
Steve Rasnic Tem  
Ted Mancuso



Robert Silverberg

# opinion

So *Amazing* is reborn again. I rejoice at that, for *Amazing* has been important to me for a long time. As a boy more than thirty years ago I read it with intense excitement; as a young writer a quarter of a century ago I contributed dozens of stories to its pages; and in various ways over the past fifteen years I have acted as a behind-the-scenes consultant to its various owners and editors. Most recently, this column in the magazine has been a vehicle for my thoughts about the world of science fiction. So I'm glad to see yet another rebirth. *Amazing* has more lives than the Phoenix; and it seems to go through a total transformation of its essential nature every few years. Its survival against such severe odds has been important to all of us who have a sense of history and love science fiction.

*Amazing* was, after all, the first magazine totally devoted to the publishing of science fiction. There were other magazines of the fantastic and the off-trail before it—*Weird Tales*, for instance, which had been in business for three years when the first number of *Amazing Stories* went on sale in the late winter of 1926. *Thrill Book*, for another: a magazine of World War I vintage. *The Black Cat*, which went back into the nineteenth century. But those magazines were primarily vehicles for horror and fantasy, and they contained very little of what we would think of as true science fiction. Whereas *Amazing* was the genuine item right from the start: I have the April, 1926 issue on my desk, and Saturn glares out at me from its yellow cover, along with the names of H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Edgar Allen (sic) Poe. Poe, you say:

horror story. Well, yes, but it also fits the most rigorous definitions of science fiction, for it's a speculation on the suspension of the death process through hypnosis. And the other stories ("Off On A Comet," "The New Accelerator," "The Man Who Saved the Earth") proclaim their science fictional nature in their titles.

That first *Amazing* was a little before my time—my treasured copy of it was a gift from Forrest J Ackerman—but next to it on my desk just now is the first issue I can remember buying on the stands, the March 1949 number. It's a large-sized pulp magazine, 154 pages for 25¢, and it bears the slogan, "Strange Stories That Prophesy the Future!" Which wasn't altogether accurate, because the longest story in the book and the one that impressed me most powerfully at the time was "The Swordsman of Pira," a slash-and-grunt prehistoric epic in the Robert E. Howard vein by one Charles Recour, who was, I later learned, a pseudonym for Chester S. Geier. Geier also, under various pseudonyms, wrote most of the rest of the issue, except for the stories, under various pseudonyms, that were the work of Leroy Yerxa. Heinlein? Asimov? Not in *Amazing*, not then. In 1949 *Amazing* was a magazine for kids, full of third-rate adventure stories banged out at a penny a word by a little stable of Chicago hacks. I didn't mind. I was a high-school sophomore, and though I enjoyed the more sophisticated stuff that a couple of the other magazines purveyed, I gobbled up the wild and woolly nonsense that *Amazing* supplied every month.

Quickly I collected stacks of back issues, almost to the start. That way I learned that

in the 1920's, under Hugo Gernsback, *Amazing* had been a staid and dignified magazine of very large format, specializing in serious and long-winded scientific speculation. In 1929 Gernsback lost control of the magazine in a bankruptcy procedure, but it continued more or less in the same vein under his assistant, T. O'Connor Sloane, who edited the magazine until he was almost 90. Then it was sold—another of its rebirths—to a Chicago outfit that jazzed it up and turned it into a lively action magazine for young readers, which gradually decayed into the trashy operation that delighted me in the late 1940s. When the publisher moved to New York, the long-time editor, Ray Palmer, chose to stay behind; and control passed to one of his best writers, Howard Browne. Howard immediately set about doing the Phoenix routine with *Amazing*. The February 1950 issue, decked out in a cover that struck my adolescent sensibilities as indescribably splendid but which just looks silly to me today, proclaimed "A NEW FIELD OF SCIENCE FICTION!"—which turned out to mean 32 extra pages every month and a greater reliance on the big names of the field (Sturgeon, de Camp, Leiber, etc.) Browne had great plans for turning *Amazing* into a slick magazine of high quality, but the advent of the Korean War in the summer of 1950 made a change of format inadvisable because of paper shortages, and for a few years the magazine cruised along in the old action-adventure pulp-mag guise.

Then in 1953 came a radical switch to digest size, with fine paper and color illustrations and the best science fiction that top rates could get: Bradbury, Heinlein, Asimov, Walter Miller, everybody worthwhile you could name. (Not me. I was still trying to figure out how it was done.) Browne's startling metamorphosis of the old bang-bang magazine into a class act failed; expenses far outran income, and within a couple of years he reverted to the action formula, though retaining some vestiges of the improved smaller format.

That was where I came in. Browne, in New York, had by 1955, recreated Ray

Palmer's old Chicago stable of reliable, high-volume writers with a different cast of characters; and as a very young pro I wangled my way in. I sold him a bunch of stories in the summer of 1955—only six years since I had begun reading the magazine as a wide-eyed kid, but it seemed like decades to me—and for the next couple of years I had a steady agreement to supply so many words a month at so many (but not very many) dollars per month. Some of my work appeared under the same pseudonyms—Alexander Blade, Ivar Jorgenson, and such—whose output I had adored when I was 14.

It was not what Howard Browne really wanted to be doing as an editor, this purveying of machine-made junk; and it was not really what I wanted to do as a writer; and in time both he and I drifted away from *Amazing*. The magazine grew drearier and drearier, until it was casually assigned to a new editor who had once been Browne's secretary: Cele Goldsmith. What qualifications she had to be a science-fiction editor I never knew, but it didn't matter: she did a magnificent job, and suddenly writers were flocking to contribute to the revived *Amazing*. That was about 1962. Where she would have taken the magazine I can't say, but it rose from month to month in everyone's estimation—until its publishers sold it to a semi-retired paperback executive. Cele resigned and the newest incarnation of *Amazing* turned into no more than a bi-monthly anthology of stories reprinted from past issues. One or two new stories were included as window-dressing.

But the old-story format didn't go over, and part-time editors were hired to find new material at cheap rates—Harry Harrison and Barry Malzberg, among others, and when they gave up in despair Ted White took over, and for about a decade performed miracles on a minuscule budget. Then *Amazing* changed hands again—and moved to Arizona. Its share of the sf magazine audience had dwindled to almost nothing by then; but once more, under Elinor Mavor's capable direction, the nearly defunct operation came back to life. Nevertheless, the magazine never really re-

established itself. Elinor was the last of a series of dedicated editors who were compelled by the necessities of budgetary problems to practice extraordinary economics, and the economies showed. The readership was loyal, but there was no real way for the magazine to compete with its much more prosperous contemporaries.

So now a new publisher, a new editor, a new infusion of capital, new hopes, a new *Amazing*—at least the eighth or ninth new *Amazing* in the magazine's amazing 56-year history. George Scithers has a flotilla of Hugos to demonstrate that he knows something about editing science-fiction

magazines—and the people behind him are the ones who reshaped the fantasy life of the nation with *Dungeons & Dragons™*, which is testimony to commercial skill as well as high inventiveness. This newest new *Amazing* is part of a continuum of publishing history unparalleled in our field. It's going to be interesting to see what happens next to this much-beloved and apparently indestructible pioneer of science-fiction magazines.

*Robert Silverberg*



### A MONSTER MANIA

Though Frankenstein long ago fell,  
At night there are times when I dwell  
On this observation  
About his creation:  
It's possibly still dead and well!

—John D. Seate

**Myth Conception** by Robert L. Asprin (\$4.95, Starblaze Books, Donning Company) This is the second novel featuring the apprentice magician Skeeve and his demon mentor Aahz (the earlier novel was *Another Fine Myth*). In this one, Skeeve is convinced that it is a good idea to hire himself out as mercenary sorcerer to an emissary or as mercenary sorcerer to an emissary of his most noble majesty Rodrick the Fifth, King of Possiltum. Skeeve and his companion Gleep the dragon find themselves between two warring armies a short time later, with only their sense of timing (always bad) and Skeeve's command of magical powers (uncertain at best) to save them. Although Rodrick the Fifth thought an illusionist could save money in standing off an army in place of an expensive array of mercenary soldiers, he finds that Skeeve isn't exactly a powerhouse of sorcery.

Asprin's Ashz and Skeeve books are witty and humorous, with vivid scenes and a sprinkling of imaginative and fresh touches throughout. They are a pleasant antidote to some of the more ponderous, and serious tomes produced in the fantasy genre lately.

### **A Life in the Day of...Odysseys of the Imagination in Other Worlds Than Ours**

by Frank M. Robinson (\$12.50, Bantam Books) Robinson has been part of the writing scene for more than thirty years, writing sf stories and editing a men's magazine. Along the way he has built up a treasure trove of conversational anecdotes (some of which I heard when I met him at a con a couple of years ago). He is a caring person and this comes through in the stories collected in *A Life in the Day of*, and in the story introductions.

He wrote "The Wreck of the Ship John B." and told his agent to submit it to *Analog* first. He disobeyed and soon gave Robinson a \$3,000 check from *Playboy*. The story concerns a vacant ship in space whose crew has disappeared without a struggle. Whatever force or being caused the

# The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

Tom Staicar

crew to die awaits the group which has been sent to investigate the empty ship.

Another story is his reminiscence of Haight-Ashbury around the time of the Summer of Love when Robinson lived near the area.

A good collection by a writer who should be better known inside the sf world. By the way, he is the same Frank M. Robinson who co-authored the non-sf bestseller *The Gold Crew* and the novel which became one of the two books combined to create the major film *The Towering Inferno*.

---

**Visions of the Universe: Paintings by Kazuaki Iwasaki, Text by Isaac Asimov, Preface by Carl Sagan (The Cosmos Store, 2409 Honolulu Avenue,**

---

Staicar lives with his wife Joy in Ann Arbor, MI, where he is supervisor in the Interlibrary Loan Office and selector of sf acquisitions for the University of Michigan Graduate Library. An avid reader of sf for many years, Staicar has written about it for such magazines as *The Twilight Zone Magazine*, *Writer's Digest*, *New Magazine Review*, and *Science Fiction Review*. His books *The Feminine Eye: Science Fiction and the Women Who Write It*, and *The Critical Encounters II*, and Fritz Leiber are published by Frederick Ungar Pub. Co.



Montrose, CA 91020) This is the first book from Carl Sagan's publishing venture The Cosmos Store. Using his vast popular appeal as a springboard, the company offers books and related materials which have a science orientation. Sagan's success as a science popularizer is legendary, with his TV series and bestselling book *Cosmos* building an audience of millions who are eager for more knowledge about our universe and its wonders.

*Visions of the Universe* is a large, rectangular volume containing one of the most beautiful and awe-inspiring collections of astronomical paintings ever assembled. These intricately-detailed works show us glimpses of the origins of the solar system, the view inside the rings of Saturn, and a volcano on Mars. Although obviously speculative in some ways, these are based on the most authoritative current data from the robot space probes and other sources. Leaving behind none of the sense of wonder evoked by the early *Amazing Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* covers, Iwasaki's paintings are based on fact.

It will come as no shock to you that the facing pages containing text by Isaac Asimov contain engaging and informative background material which greatly enhances the value of the book. This is a beautiful volume which cannot fail to delight anyone who looks through its pages.

The Cosmos Store also offers a unique calendar with depictions by Iwasaki of the compressed history of the origins of the Earth. In addition, there is a fascinating instrument called *The Cosmosphere* (\$19.95) which is a bowl-shaped metal device which can be used outside to find the exact location of visible stars and planets. The motion of the constellations across the sky in various seasons can be plotted by rotating *The Cosmosphere* according to the day of the year. The most deluxe and easy-to-use starfinder ever devised, *The Cosmosphere* is a great gift idea (especially to give yourself).

### **Magill Surveys—Science Fiction: Alien Encounter** (\$7.95, Salem, P.O.

Box 2062, Pasadena, CA 91105) This is a one volume distillation of the contents of the hardcover set *Survey of Science Fiction Literature*, devoted exclusively to the theme of alien encounters. The contents include plot summaries and discussions in brief form of the major novels dealing with alien contact such as *Childhood's End*, *The Forever War*, *Way Station*, and many others. Useful for students and for those who want brief overview of dozens of books (including some with which they are not yet familiar), this is a good reader's guide.

### **Contemporary Literary Criticism, volume 19** (\$66.00, Gale Research)

Science fiction has not always enjoyed the critical attention it enjoys today. The inclusion of a few sf and fantasy authors in such a prestigious series as this one is indicative of the increasing respect earned by our writers. Excerpted from a variety of journals and review sources, this volume contains critical assessments of Borges, Asimov, Farmer and others. Although most of the writers represented are from other fields, you would do well to consult this series at a library, or recommend its purchase as a research tool.

### **Tales From the Nightside** by Charles L. Grant (\$11.95, Arkham House)

A fine collection from a writer who is carving out a name for himself in contemporary horror literature. His short stories in this book include Nebula and World Fantasy Award nominees. In Grant's tales, things start to go wrong in the lives of ordinary, often lonely, people. Whether at Oxrun Station or other towns, the quiet and unobtrusive pace of horror quickens midway through a normal day, gripping people's lives in terror. Charles L. Grant is one of those writers who has refined and developed the craft of horror and has added a sophistication and maturity to its written form.

**At the Mountains of Madness and Other Tales of Terror by H.P.**

**Lovecraft (\$2.25, Del Ray)** This is part of a new uniform series of reprints of the major writings of H.P. Lovecraft. Others include *The Tomb*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *The Lurking Fear*, *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, and *The Doom That Came to Sarnath*. The title novella in *At the Mountains of Madness* is about an Antarctic expedition from Miskatonic University which unearths the evil force lurking in the City of the Old Ones, while another tale in the collection concerns a mysteriously elusive, yet ubiquitous rat named Brown Jenkin.

Whether or not you take horror like this seriously, these are stories which have influenced all the writers of supernatural horror from Clark Ashton Smith and Robert Bloch to Ramsey Campbell. Taken on one level, they are amusing and diverting entertainments written in archaic and aristocratic style. On another level, these stories evoke a sense of comic dread on a large scale, telling of the possibilities which may exist in dimensions in hyperspace. Lovecraft took his work seriously and he detested any dilution of the strength and purity of horror. Although current writers and film-makers have surpassed Lovecraft in blood and gore, Lovecraft's works remain worthwhile as pioneering works which explore the meanings of terror and the macabre.

**The Dream Master by Roger Zelazny (\$2.25, Ace Books)** As part of its special promotion of Hugo and Nebula winners, Ace Books is reprinting one of my all-time favorites: *The Dream Master*. Few can match the quality of writing which Roger Zelazny produced in this superb novel. Expanded from his novella "He Who Shapes," the story tells of Charles Render, a neuropsychiatrist. In this future world, psychiatrists are able to share their minds with patients, shaping the patient's dreams and fantasies and

leading them into paths that will help them cure themselves of their problems. In weaving their minds together, the two people run a risk of damage which could occur if something went wrong. One mind could overpower the other, or a particularly strong fantasy or fear could do this to both of them.

Render is flawed by his tendency to dwell too much on the auto accident deaths of his wife and daughter nine years earlier. When a blind woman named Eileen Shallot yearns to see through Render's eyes during therapy sessions, the stage is set for a dangerous mind-transfer situation with sanity as the thing both of them could lose forever.

*The Dream Master* is filled with symbolism and allusion to myth, and these two elements aid an undercurrent which enriches this classic novel. One of the best of the award-winners.

**Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers** edited by Curtis C. Smith (\$65.00, St. Martin's Press) A massive large format reference book, *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* contains authoritative information about more than 600 sf writers who write in English. The growing number of foreign language writers whose works are now available in English are represented in an added section. The book has a biography, a concise bibliography, and one critical essay for each of the 600 writers, making this a valuable reference work for anyone who wants to find out more about a particular writer. Highly recommended. ●

# intercom

Dear Elinor,

I very much liked the March '82 issue of *Amazing*. The front cover art was the only failing; too little to do with the characters, too much to do with the ideology. The other art was all wonderful. Gary Freeman brought the most introspection.

As always, there were good and bad stories. Ernest Hogan ("The Rape of Things to Come") had some interesting thoughts on growth and change in a stagnant culture. Violence is always with us and, as a woman, I do not find his idea of rape as future-entertainment wrong, but rather, frightening with respect to how we live our lives today. We already find ourselves doing what is expected of us blindly or for expediency so why not hire people to rape, murder or otherwise harm us?

I have the highest praise for "The Last Picasso" by Ron Montana, and I'm not even a sports car fan. Don't we all turn back, sometimes? But I was not impressed by "Moon of Ice". It was weak in action/interaction.

Keep bringing us such excellent writing. Go to bi-monthly.

Anxiously waiting for the next issue,

Zetta C. Dillie  
Phoenix, AZ

*And, as a woman, you got the point of "The Rape of Things to Come"—missed by several male letter writers. Interesting!*  
EM

Editors,

Speaking as a man who considers the crime of rape to be one of Feminism's best cases against our Macho Culture, I found Ernest Hogan's story "The Rape of Things to Come" (March 1982) to be in very poor

taste. Granted, it is a satire piece, and I praise you for not allowing the Moral Majority to censor your magazine. However, presentation of the violent crime of rape as a game that men and women play with each other is hardly an image that women, as potential rape victims, will appreciate. Maintaining a sense of humor with regard to society's problems is an important part of staying sane in these crazy times, but viewing rape as 'fun' in any context only reinforces attitudes that I feel it is time for us as humans to overcome.

Scott Stevens  
Minneapolis, MN

*This was a story that demanded reading beyond the buzz words. Is it too farfetched in a society where entertainment already often involves violence, to imagine a future world where people are so bored out of their skulls that they would solicit "rape" for fun? Also, the fact that they solicited the "rape" made it something else. — EM*

Dear Editor:

Brad Linaweaver's ingeniously conceived, skillfully styled, and economically sensible "Moon of Ice" (March 1982) could have done without the contrived recapping of how Germany won. Back in the thirties, perhaps making characters tell each other what they already knew was the only way pulp authors knew of informing their readers. But can the *Amazing* of 1982 seriously suggest that even the verbal Goebbels would have needed or wanted to explain what he already knew to himself?

Nearly all historians indulge this "fatal itch to explain everything" (Harriet Vane) and nearly always they hurt the story. The more such detail, the more the reader stops to ask questions—for instance:

(1) To achieve nuclear weapons and long-range bombers, what other war production did Germany sacrifice?

(2) How could London be hit by a V-2 (range 200 miles) with the Allies on the Rhine and German transport in chaos?

(3) Even supposing that two or three nuclear bombs could have won Germany a compromise peace in the West, how would that have refastened the Nazi yoke on the two and a half million Russian troops then on the Oder?

Better Mr. Linaweaver—like Deighton and Sarban—should have taken Nazi victory for granted and concentrated on the 1965 of second-generation conflict and self-reexamination. The wordage saved, augmented by elimination of the heavy-handed afterword, could have been redeployed to ad verisimilitude to the SS state in Burgundy—showing the readers, not just telling them.

Stephen Fabian's cover perpetuates a fine old sf tradition by grabbing the bookstore browser more effectively than it illustrates the story.

Gordon B. Chamberlain  
Corvallis, OR

Dear Brad:

I want to tell you again that I was most impressed with "Moon of Ice." The atmosphere in the story was very well sustained and your imagined other-time-line Germany had an awesome reality—frighteningly so to my mind—it is certainly the germ of a very exciting novel and one which should find ready readers. Your characterization was carefully built up and the situations were not at all strained but such, I felt, as would follow naturally that other ending to the war. A good piece of work which can be built into a thrilling novel and you must do it.

Andre Norton  
Winter Park, FL

Dear Elinor,

A few words on the March 1982 *Amazing*. Strong points: the cover art.

Good, good graphics and—at last—a cover that ties in with a major story. Pretty good story, too. Takes nerve to tackle a Nazi alternate world theme after Dick's *Man in the High Castle*. I thought it came off well.

Again, your diversity struck me as your strength and your weakness. Weakest point: "Titmouse", a sort of tired rehash of "The Monkey's Paw" and too cutesy-cute by far to my taste, from title through execution. Of course, some likely hold otherwise. The Hogan piece was interesting, not because it was particularly strong, but because I think you were the one and only chance it had of being published. It was worth reading, though I enjoyed equally his letters and his endpiece (and the end graphic).

Enjoyed the Ellison. Even more, the Montana—a superior handling of an overdone situation. Really good mood. Best piece though—beyond mood to substance—was the Connally story. They're the kind I like to read (and to write).

Keep doing this and a lot of folks will keep buying every issue and waiting for the next.

Best,

Joel Richards  
Kentfield, CA

Dear Editor,

I like to read sf but it seems I rarely read stories that please me these days. Therefore I don't often write letters to magazine editors. Perhaps I've just grown jaded, and yet after reading the March, 1982 issue of *Amazing* I had to write and point out two terrific stories that were in it.

The cover story ("Moon of Ice" by Brad Linaweaver) was very well done. There were several things about the story I'd like to point out, but I'll restrict myself to only a couple. The first most impressive feature is that the story was surprising. I feel obligated to read magazines cover to cover and began reading "Moon of Ice" as a duty—another "If the Nazis Won" story! But throughout, the author introduced

twists that kept me reading more just to see what was going to happen next. This may seem like a very minor point to bring up, but in fact most of stories are predictable. I think, after internal consistency, surprise is the most important element in short fiction.

A second plus for the story is that the author had the sheer guts to ignore "strict realism" for a fiction that was much more intriguing. For example, I am convinced that even if Germany had not been defeated in 1945, the Nazi philosophy and German political structure could not have sustained itself much longer because of the inherent weaknesses they had. In other words, I don't think the world Brad Linaweaver described could possibly exist. But guess what? I don't care! The story was much more delightful than any of the "realistic what-if" stories I've read, and I appreciate the courage it took to present to the public a story that goes beyond what would "probably" have really happened. The courage is all the greater in dealing with Nazi Germany, a subject in which many self-claimed experts are quick to guard jealously their personal theories of what could have happened.

Because of these two points and more, "Moon of Ice" is an excellent story.

Just as I had to be brief in my praise of "Moon of Ice", so too am I forced to merely point out that "Julie of the Shadows" (by Lawrence Connolly) is a superb story.

I am so very tired of the hopelessly childish characterization that appears in much sf written by perennial college kids who grew up watching *Star Trek*. It's difficult to write good, positive, humanistic characterization without sinking to the level of TV sitcoms. Lawrence Connolly's characters are delightfully earthy, confused, disappointed and yet each is also noble, too. Captain Kirk was never very heroic to me. He was a PTA-approved boy scout; Ben Cheever, on the other hand, is a real hero. In fact, the Stacy brothers and Julie are heroic as well—not heroes in the sense of fighting monsters and leaping over tall buildings, but heroes in the sense that they face life and its obligations. This quiet little story about human commitments is much more exciting to me than any of the swords-in-space stuff that has become so

common.

I've always had a soft spot for *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. One of them (I can't recall which) was the first prozine I read about 20 years ago. Both were my favorites in my fannish days (When Ted White began editing), and while I haven't read every issue since, I've tried to keep up. Do you want to know why?

It's because *Amazing* surprises me. Much of what you publish I simply don't like (sorry, but it's true). Some of it, like the Harlan Ellison story and the Van Vogt piece in the March issue I like because I disagree with what is said. And sometimes, as you can see from what I wrote above, I become genuinely enthusiastic over what I've read. To me, almost all the other sf magazines that have appeared in the past five years have been boring. I read them halfway through and I ask why I'm not doing something else because I know that this magazine usually has artificially happy endings, that one has painfully poor writing, and another panders to the L-5, engineering mentality. Even *S & FS* is predictable most of the time. *Amazing* is the one sf magazine that is different every time I read it. Sometimes I hate the whole issue, sometimes I enjoy it. But always I only know which type of issue it is *after* I've read it. You may laugh, but for me, that's important.

One final point: I hate to say it, but you have some of the worst artists working for you outside of fanzines. Steve Fabian does well, yes, but only rarely does one of your other regulars come up to even minimal commercial art standards. I don't think "art" in an sf magazine is important, but if you insist on art in the first place, at least have good art. It takes so little to do so. (By comparison—and I bet you're tired of these comparison's!—Ted White issues had very nice illustration most of the time.) I hope you try to do something about this. One tip: airbrushing is "in" these days, but airbrushing a bad drawing is like putting Brooks Brothers clothes on a fat man—it doesn't make the fat man look chic, it makes the clothes look bad. Don't be blinded by superficial technique!

Thanks for "Moon of Ice" and "Julie of the Shadows"! Thanks very much!



Charles T. Smith  
St. Paul, MN

Dear Ms. Editor:

The magazine continues to be challenging. I note that Silverberg deprecates "series" books even as he writes one. The reviewer of another magazine attacked such productions as prostitution of art or caving in to pressure. I myself find that some books (*The Mote in God's Eye* for certain) would have been much better for being two books or several. Many subjects, themes, places or characters merit for more attention than one pass can allow, as Silverberg admits.

At the other end of the magazine the illustration by Odbert reveals sheer genius. The symbol of the tail assembly *could* be an eagle. It could be an Islamic moon with addition. It could be a sickle, plus. It might be none of these. And a star goes well with all.

As to "Their Daily Bread": When OPEC was formed, the idea of an evil Arab conspiracy fitted well with our paranoia over Israel and helped cover the fact that the two chief organizers of the group, and chief advocates of higher oil prices were our "great friends," the Shah of Iran and the president of Venezuela, and that the chief beneficiaries of the high prices were the multinational oil companies based in U.S. and Europe. It does remain true, however, that for many Opec countries the chief consumers of leavened wheat bread would be the well-to-do classes—and the American and European technicians working there.

Brad Linaweaver has a different problem for "Moon of Ice," of which he seems not to be aware. The point is that people (perhaps with rare exceptions) do not "opt for evil." The so-called "Problem of Evil" is mis-stated. Instead of "Why would a good God allow evil?" the problem is "Why do all those evil people insist on calling me evil?"

Being what we are and in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we do what we have to do, then justify

ourselves as best we may. This is why so many writers have flunked the test of writing in the first person a story of a character of which they disapprove. Linaweaver does far better than most such stories I've seen. The fact that he doesn't seem to know what fascism is about is of no matter. Few fascists know either. Of course the Italian Iron and Steel Manufacturers Association who hired the bombastic Socialist editor to take over Italy for them did know. And so did he. And the German General Staff did when they hired Hitler, Goebbels and Goering.

Mussolini's methods were out of Italian culture and those of the Nazis were out of German culture. And cultures and societies justify themselves through fantasy. One of my earliest memories of a world beyond my own is of a torchlight political parade in a small town. I still remember the sloganized chant though I left the town sixty-five years ago, when I was seven, and the state the year after that.

Fantasy is powerful stuff.

Clifton Amsbury

Richmond, CA

Dear Elinor,

I love your zine, I really do, but there are a few ever-so-tiny suggestions I'd like to present to you....?

First of all, the letter column. I would like to see a longer one, and a more interesting one. And, to get you off to a good start, and with your permission (I need you to print the letter, so I need your permission) I'd like to start a (Ta-DA!) debate!

In reference to Louis Baumgart's missive in the Jan. 1982 Intercom, since when is style experimentation meaningless? It is a dying, nay, dead literature that has no room for style experimentation, and so is, I firmly believe, a literature of life. It was the only literature that would accept Malzberg and his contemporaries' (Bunch, Ballard, Moorcock, Lafferty) bold new style of writing. I am speaking of, and I'm sure Baumgart was thinking of, the

"New Wave" of the sixties.

I think the reason Baumgart doesn't like Malzberg's style of writing is because it gives itself to the reader in direct proportion to what the reader gives to it. Baumgart obviously doesn't like to be challenged in his sf reading. Well, I do, and Malzberg's fiction is constantly mind-stretching, which I think is a very important ingredient in fantasy. It makes one think in a way that formula fiction cannot. Malzberg has a special quality, a quality present only in sf literature. You call it "Zonk". I call it the sense of wonder, and it stretches down to the very crux of our (both of our) reading experiences. It's the question: why do we read fantasy?

The answer, for me, and I suspect for most of fandom (you people out there will back me up on this, I hope) is the sense of wonder. For me, the sense of wonder is Malzberg—as well as Heinlein, Asimov, Ellison, Sturgeon, etc., etc. All of these writers have it.

But sense of wonder must someday fade, and hard reality intrudes. Even for those of us who no longer get the same, unadulterated joy out of reading sf that we used to, sf can still be looked at with an affectionate eye—as the literature of freedom. The literature where Mark Cashman can enjoy picture books and Robert Silverberg can enjoy dystopian visions—and anyone can enjoy either. That is why the arguments for both Malzberg and Baumgart fail. Because neither "Old-wave" or "New Wave" rule. They both coexist together in this wonderful literature that we call science fiction. Or speculative fiction. Or scientific fiction. Or whatever.

Now, Elinor, what do you think?

All pontifications aside, now for more general comments and requests.

I would be thrilled to death if you, Elinor, would start writing editorial essays along the line of what Ted White used to do. What do you think about it.

Please drop "Futures Fantastic", and bring back Fahnstalk's column. The prozines have been ignoring fandom for too long. You've said previously that you need fan support; you should give them that kind of recognition. It might be added

incentive to buy your zine. Other than the excellent Fiction, of course.

Speaking of excellent fiction, this ish had a disturbing lack of it. There was only one good piece in the entire issue. ("Comnet 2", in case you were wondering.) I was especially disappointed in the Dellinger short-short, Hackneyed! Paul, I thought I could trust Ya!

Now that you've roused Ova Hamlet from her sleep of too many years, it's about time you reprinted some of her earlier magnum opuses. Perhaps "Man Swings SF"? Or "Battered Like a Brass Bippy"? Or "Music in the Air"?

Your artists are some of the best in the field, especially Freeman and Day. Don't let them go. And why don't you do any more illustrations, Elinor?

In closing, I'd like to say that I think you did Louis Baumgart a disservice when you printed his ignorant and stupid remark concerning the illustration for Schweitzer's "Raving Lunacy". You revealed him to be small-minded in front of your entire readership.

Speaking of your readership, I'm sure it will grow! You're the best, and people can't ignore the best for long!

Peace and love from Florida,

Brian Doherty  
Jacksonville, FL

*I call Malzberg thought-provoking: Ernest Hogan ("Rape of Things to Come") is "ZONK".*

*Read my editorial in this issue. And thanks for caring. — EM*

Dear Ms Mavor,

The otherwise excellent Encyclopedia of Science Fiction stated (circa 78) that Amazing's prospects "now look bleak." I have just discovered AMZ's alive and well on our newsstands and am overjoyed that the prognosis was mistaken. I am saddened the prognosis was mistaken. I am saddened, too, for I've missed many issues prior to my discovery!

Somtow Sucharitkul's "Last line of the

Haiku" (Now., 1981 issue) was movingly accomplished and if the book "Starship and Haiku" maintains sentimentalisation, then it will be a memorable novel indeed. A kudo also for Gary Freeman's artwork, it ideally complemented the tale.

May I also compliment you on your approach to new writers; it is refreshing and heartening and surely must be good for sf, the writers and yourselves: a bold, brave editorial stance, for you must be deluged with Mss. You deserve success and, ultimately, a monthly magazine. (I do feel that any distribution problems your readers encounter would diminish should your print schedule become monthly, as wholesalers may be more willing to handle the magazine. Of course, there is subscription...) Mind, I am in effect suggesting that you take on 100% more work!

Best wishes for the New Year. Yes, I, too, have enclosed an Ms. for consideration... Hope you have time to read it!

R. Nicholson-Morton  
Fareham, England

Dear Elinor,

I didn't think I needed liberating until I picked up a copy of *Amazing* and read it. Then I realized I'd let my husband dictate my taste in science fiction for seventeen years: I had assumed there was nothing worth reading besides his favorites. I now stand with my own counsel and say some of your stories are the very best!

After I read "A Plague of Butterflies", (Nov., 1981) the manuscript I was going to submit looked like fourth-perk-from-the-same-grounds: very thin. So I've worked hard to send a better one, and please give my congratulations to Orson Scott Card.

Will you interview Somtow Sucharitkul? I'd like to know if I pronounce his name right. In his *Mallworld* stories he's what I wanted to find when I joined Cepheid Variables at Texas A&M, and in "The Last Line of the Haiku" he is another being, who touches me thus:

Our patterns merging  
strange thought forms become in me  
pure understanding.

With affection,

Lynne Ellen Hoverson  
Seattle, WA

*I hope we will be able to run an interview with Somtow. Last name is pronounced Su-char-it-kul. — EM.*

Dear Ms. Mavor and Friends:

Good news and bad news. Good news is that, no matter how much I like your short stories and columns, the **REAL** reason I buy *Amazing* is to read the poetry. It's damned hard to find sf poetry, so it is a real treat to pick up an issue and read the likes of Peter Payack, Orson Scott Card, Bob Frazier (!), Joey Froelich, or Roger Zelazny, to name only a few. Too often what passes for "poetry" in sf is a filksong, a bawdy limerick, or an improbable bestiary. Your selections are outstanding. Give me **MORE, MORE, MORE!**

Bad news. As a woman and a reader, I am annoyed at the unbalanced presentation of nudity in your magazine. I take no offense at nudity *per se* (quite the contrary), but I am tired of nudes exclusively of my own sex. I have now finished a cursory examination of my back issues to May of this year and find female nudes in every issue but no nude men. Don't you agree this is a little skewed? When men do appear "nude", they are shown from the rear, in silhouette, coyly three-quarters, or in briefs. But check it out, say, Alicia Austin's illo for "The Nosepickers of Dawr" in July, 1981. You see a woman in a classic *Playboy* pose, while two quite modest gentlemen hide behind her. Even a woman artist, it seems, is not immune to the double standard.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not calling for censorship, God forbid. I'd just like to see a little more *balance*. Perhaps you are afraid of "offending your readership", as some put it; ask yourselves why male nudity is supposed to be

inherently more offensive than female nudity. I'm a grownup, I can take it.

More good news and kudos. I really enjoy your interviews and columns. Your interview with Algis Budrys was outstanding, and Robert Silverberg is consistently intelligent and erudite. Your futures column is always thought-provoking. I'll pass in silence over your book reviews, and praise your story selection. In all, *Amazing* is a class act from cover to cover.

So why are those covers always filled with FEMALE nudes?

Sincerely,

Sarah, Stegall  
Austin, TX

Dear Ms. Mavor,

The March '82 issue was solid gold. "Cheese" was gourmet souffle, "The Rape" was a mind-fu\*\*er, "Moon of Ice", a unique snowflake, "Picasso", a masterpiece, "Titmouse" stood alone, like "The Cheese". The rest were icing on cake that you could surely have and eat, too.

Michael Polo  
Orange, NJ

Dear Elinor,

I've just been finishing off the Nov. issue of *Amazing*. I think I've figured out what makes it so much better than everything else on the stands these days. It's your approach to the readers. There's a very strong rapport being built up (reminiscent of a fanzine, more than anything, but without the loss of professionalism) between the editorial content and the readers. Of course if you add all the strong stories and articles, what have you got but a winner? I just hope that this incarnation lasts.

Charles de Lint  
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Elinor,

When I saw the name, Harlan Ellison on the front cover of the March, 1982 issue of *Amazing Stories*, I immediately bought it. Of course, I would have bought the magazine if Mr. Ellison's name had not appeared on the front cover credits, since I am a dedicated fan and collector of *Amazing Stories*. However, it is always a pleasure to see stories by my favorite author included in my favorite science fiction periodical. I know your magazine has a smaller (though very loyal) following than your competitors' and therefore cannot attract many name authors, so I am indeed grateful that you have been able to purchase new stories from Mr. Ellison.

"The Cheese Stands Alone" is definitely one of the better stories I have read by Mr. Ellison in quite awhile. It is a very mindbending and enjoyable short story and by far the most superior of all the others included in this issue.

Since "A Boy and His Dog" is one of (if not) my favorite Ellison stories I was delighted to read that Mr. Ellison has a new novel about the further adventures of Blood. I can hardly wait to get my hands on it. Do you know when it will be published? (Not sure.—EM)

I look forward to seeing more of Mr. Ellison's stories published in *Amazing*. The More... The Better!!!

Steve Fabian's cover for this issue was excellent! This is definitely his best cover in all the years that he has been illustrating for *Amazing*. And Gary Freeman's interior illustrations are always a pleasure.

You can drop Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" anytime. What the hell is this feature about, anyway? Use this space instead to lengthen Tom Staicar's Book Reviews which is the best feature, other than the letters page, which could also be increased in length.

Well keep up the high standards and let's go monthly, okay?

Dave Last, Jr.  
Sarnia, Ontario

*Silverberg shares interesting experiences and ideas relating to the literature of science fiction. — EM*

Dear Elinor,

I hope everything is still going well with the magazines. I received my January 1982 issue of *Amazing* about the first or second week in November; it was quite an enjoyable issue.

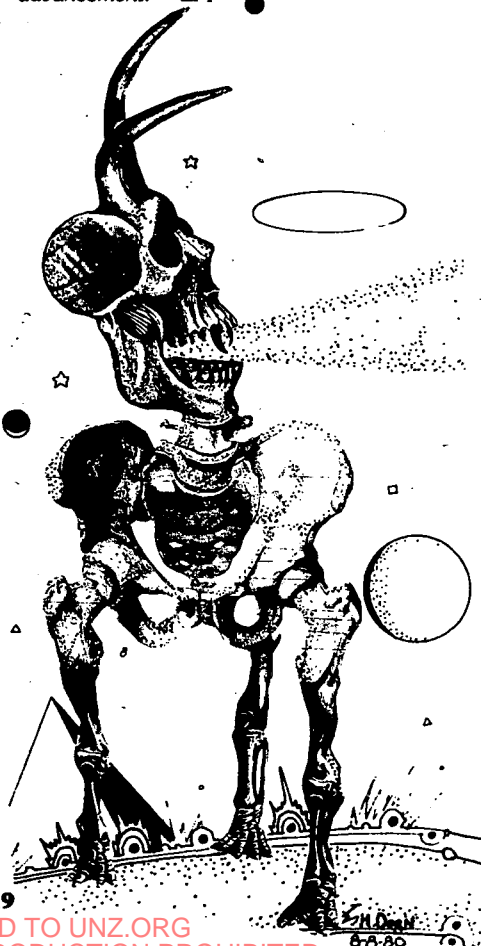
I think the best part of it was George R.R. Martin's superb story, "Unsound Variations"; it has remained clear in my mind now for two months and that usually means it will be remembered practically forever. (As long as I'm kicking around, anyhow. Stories that don't make it are automatically erased after a month's time.) I hope you continue to get new work from him; "Unsound Variations" and "The Fall" (with Lisa Tuttle) were two of the highlights of your year. "Small Magic" was also good, and I did enjoy the chance to read Sturgeon's Hall of Fame story, "A Way of Thinking". "Doublecross" was a nice short-short to end the issue with, and the Manly Wade Wellman piece was an interesting excerpt—better than the truncated Zelazny excerpt in September. Still, of the "sneak previews" you've done of late, the Sucharitkul piece ("The Last Line of the Haiku", Nov., 1981) was the most successful for me—I bought the paperback when I saw it downtown, and was not disappointed. Had I not read the magazine "preview" first, quite likely I would have overlooked the book—so thank you. (I don't imagine Mr. Sucharitkul would be too displeased, either.) *(The book is Starship and Haiku, Pocket Books—EM)*

"Comnet 2" was not one of my favourite stories, but then neither am I very pleased with the direction television seems to be taking, so perhaps it was the plausibility of the story that depressed me. The update on immortality (Jan, 1982) was interesting, though I still am inclined to wonder whether immortality is really the great idea it sounds to be. The world has barely survived 70

years of many individuals; hundreds of years certain people might be more than any of us could stand. And I'm still not satisfied about the stagnation of society question. —Still, it would be nice to try immortality out and see what happens...

Dave Stover  
Ontario, Canada

*Immortality would be another accomplishment of technology, probably emerging as we move off the planet to begin space colonization. The resulting problems would have to be dealt with as with all others arising from technological advancement. — EM*





## A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL SHAARA

Brad Linaweaver

William Alan Ritch



*DEATH CREPT UP* behind Michael Shaara and tapped him on the shoulder. Shaara turned around and saw a paleface winking at him. But there was as much arrogance as menace in *Death's* expression. Even a spirit can take too much for granted. Mike winked back.

Here was a man who was clinically dead, his heart not beating for fifty five minutes. He had a doctor who was as stubborn as his patient, refusing to give up. Against all the odds, Shaara survived. But the brain cannot go unfed for such a length of time without a consequence—part of his memory had been affected.

Shaara set his mind to the task of recovery. And when he was well, he wrote an article about the skill and dedication of his physician. Part of the reason for the article, he said, was so people would believe his story! The *Saturday Evening Post* (8-27-66) bought it, "The New Lazarus." The American Medical Association awarded it.

Since then, Micheal Shaara has become famous. He received the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for his major Civil War novel, *The Killer Angels: A Novel About the Four Days of Gettysburg*.

The bicentennial year marks his twenty-fifth anniversary as a professional writer since John Campbell bought his first story back in 1951, "All the Way Back." Throughout the rest of the Fifties, Shaara continued to sell science fiction to Campbell, Gold and Conklin. Typical of

the response to him in this period was the following from Sam Sackett of *Fantastic Worlds*: "We feel on the basis of "Soldier Boy" and "The Book" (both published in *Galaxy*) that Michael Shaara is...in a position to make a significant contribution to science fiction." H.L. Gold had this to say: "Someone like you (Shaara) can discover the new paths."

But the new path he found led him out of the field altogether. Until now. His third novel marks his first science fiction novel. The first novel he wrote was in 1968, *The Broken Place*. A Korean war vet—a weary man and good boxer—has a tough time when he comes back to the states. Much of this book was autobiographical. Shaara had been a boxer and served in Korea as a paratroop infantry sergeant. He says he learned more about writing from his experiences than from anything academic—seeing men in stress situations was his real education. (Being a policeman in St. Petersburg Florida provided the background for his popular Playboy story, "The Peeping Tom Patrol.")

He taught creative writing at Florida State University with a "do it first; talk about it later" approach. In 1967 he was voted most popular teacher. It was the professional Shaara who infused historical descriptions of Gettysburg with a realist's pain and a Romantic's wonder:

"He did not understand it: a mile of men flowing slowly, steadily, inevitably up the long green ground, dying all the while,

coming to kill you, and the shell bursts appearing above them like instant white flowers, and the flags all tipping and fluttering, and dimly you could hear the music and the drums, and then you could hear the officers screaming, and yet even above your own fear came the sensation of unspeakable beauty. He shook his head, opened his eyes. Professor's mind."

Historians have noted The Killer Angels' accuracy and attention to detail. Reviewers have praised the characterizations of the principal figures in the pivotal battle at Gettysburg. There are plans for a movie version.

And now, at the peak of his career, Shaara is coming back to science fiction. During a time when it is chic for some science fiction writers to lambaste their field and even sell articles about how they are deserting it, why has Michael Shaara written *The Herald*, (McGraw-Hill, 1981) a book that is one part horror story, one part fable and one part sf thriller?

To answer this question, Shaara consented to an interview at his home in Tallahassee, Florida.

—Brad Linaweaver

Brad Linaweaver's first professional sf sale was to the July, 1980 *Fantastic* ("The Competitor"). He recently appeared in March, 1982 *Amazing* with a stunning novella entitled "Moon of Ice" which may be expanded to novel length. A short story, "Clutter", written as a tribute to his friend Ray Bradbury, (who called the piece "evocative and touching") will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Amazing*. //William Alan Ritch has been an avid fan and sf collector for 10 years. In "real life" he is a "libertarian computer programmer for the Anglo-American Military Industrial Complex." His secret goal is "NOT to rule the world."—EM

**Amazing:** H.L. Gold said you were a fast rising talent in science fiction. Yet you stopped writing it for almost fifteen years.

**Shaara:** '61 was the last science fiction story.

**Amazing:** Now you're returning to the field with an sf novel that is being promoted as mainstream. Why did you leave science fiction and why are you coming back with *The Herald*?

**Shaara:** Well, there are so many answers to that! For example, I had written a story called "Death of the Hunter," while I was in Vermont. It took me three months to write and I still think it's one of the best stories I ever wrote; and when it finally got published it won a couple of awards. It was a story about a hunter three-hundred years from now who is called into a tense situation where as a professional he is expected to kill something which he knows is not an animal. (The hunter discovers that the "animal" is intelligent and he becomes so disgusted at the threat his fellow humans pose to the creature, rather than the other way around, that he ends up hunting people, taking the animal's place as a menace. BL)

I sent it to H.L. Gold and he wrote back and said he couldn't take it. He said it was undoubtedly one of the best I'd done but it was simply too strong a story for his audience. I sent it to Campbell...the same thing! It was finally printed in *Fantastic Universe*. For three months work I got paid \$75.00

The following year it was included by Judith Merril in her book of the best sf's of the year, and then I got a letter from Australia with a booklet of a science fiction club. They were citing it as the outstanding story in English of the year. Well, \$75! This has made me rather bitter.

Back in college the reason I started writing science fiction was because I didn't know anything else. I loved to read science fiction. I liked the ideas. But I learned how tough it was to make a living from writing sf after I'd been at it a while.

*The Herald* is an Idea Novel; the only way I could write it was as science fiction.

**Amazing:** How did you get into writing—why did you start in sf?

**Shaara:** In my college days, this friend of mine told me one winter, "Why don't you write the short story for a while and learn about technique and structures?" So I said to him, "Can they teach anything in those places?" And he said, "Sure they can." That Christmas, before I signed up for the creative writing class at Rutgers, I sat down and wrote my first science fiction story.

A lot of the literary stories were too depressing. I was in a depressed mood half the time anyway, and I didn't need any more of that! In fact I was a judge once in a contest where there were about forty short stories submitted and twenty some-odd were about suicide! (chuckle) That kind of thing was pretty standard in the literary kind of short story. So there I was...about twenty years old. What I wanted to do was write a short story for the fun of it instead of writing one deep and profound and all that jazz. I didn't know anything about love stories; I didn't know anything about westerns...but science fiction was different. I figured my imagination could give me an idea—something I wouldn't need from my past experience.

The first story I wrote was about something happening several billion years from now. It was called "Outside" and John Campbell sent me a letter about it. I'd sent the story in single-spaced on both sides of the page. I had no idea about what you were supposed to do and he wrote me a very nice letter. Then, just for the heck of it, I sat down and wrote a couple more. I'd write one immediately and send it in immediately...and they immediately would send it back!

Well, the fourth story I wrote was "All the Way Back." I gave that to my creative writing teacher at Rutgers. He kept it three weeks, then he gave it back to me and said, "Please don't write science fiction. Write literature." After having three weeks to look at the story objectively, I decided to re-write it. Then I sent it in to Campbell. I had no faith in myself to speak of. It was the spring of '51 and I said to myself, "If by the first of June—when we get out for the term—I haven't sold anything, then why bother with this stuff?" I was writing for the fun of it and I was writing for a public. I didn't

see any point in going on unless there was some reaction. "All the Way Back" was sold on the twenty-ninth of May.

**Amazing:** How did you feel?

**Shaara:** I'll never forget it! Campbell's check was for \$209.70. There was a statement enclosed that said: "If you will sign that you are the author of this work..." Apparently I'd improved so much in four stories that Campbell wanted to make sure I'd written it! Anyway, I lived in an apartment house, on the third flight, and I don't remember going up the stairs. I flew!

**Amazing:** "All the Way Back" was the first of your mapping command stories to see print. Was it the first you ever wrote, or had some of the previously rejected work been in the series?

**Shaara:** I think it was my first mapping command...Yes, it was.

**Amazing:** Was "Death of the Hunter" the last science fiction story you sold?

**Shaara:** No, I wrote "Citizen Gell" after that and a couple of others but I was losing the sense of fun.

**Amazing:** Which of your stories did you enjoy doing the most?

**Shaara:** "Soldier Boy" was fun to do and I got a lot of attention from that one.

**Amazing:** That was adapted for the "X-1" radio show, wasn't it?

**Shaara:** Uh-huh. I've got a copy of it on a record.

**Amazing:** Isn't your cop story, "The Peeping Tom Patrol," one of your most financially successful stories?

**Shaara:** Yeah. That one sold to Playboy and it got the cover on one of their story collections.

**Amazing:** You said there were a couple of reasons for getting out of science fiction. You've given us the financial one...

**Shaara:** I got to be around 25, 26...and my wife brought home an event one day that had happened to her about the adoption of a blind baby. It had happened in Dade County and the more I heard of it I thought, "Gee whiz, that's a fascinating story. These people adopt a blind baby and

after the adoption the kid recovers his eyesight because the reason he's blind is due to the stuff he's been eating! I said, "That's amazing..." And it was true! So I started writing a story based on the baby, and based on my experience as a cop. I found out, halfway through it, that I couldn't do it! I stopped and stumbled out, staggered around, and then tried again. It took me three months to do it.

Around the same time I had another idea for a short story about boxing. I'd been a boxer. The premise was: the boxer vs. the fighter. I lost a fight once where the other guy was a better boxer than I was, but he couldn't hit. I moved in on him. I hit him once and knocked him down. He got up and ran away, the rest of the fight and because he was a better boxer, better technically, he won the fight. But had we fought in a bar or anywhere else... I think it's a shame that the real fighter is often the loser of the fights, the way the judges rule it.

So I had these two story ideas; both were from my personal experience. I was trying to write them both at the same time but I didn't really know how to write the personal type of short story after the science fiction because the sf was primarily scientific and technical. You know that Campbell was a physics specialist. I knew how to write for him. But now, these two stories were something else. I was growing up.

**Amazing:** As you say, your stories in *Astounding/Analog* are idea oriented. But I notice that in "Grenville's Planet," the one that ran in *F and SF*, you are very style conscious. It is *how* you tell it that matters. In that respect, science fiction didn't restrict your development as a writer.

**Shaara:** It's a curious thing about style—since you mention it—that I've never understood. Several people have remarked about my style being similar to this or that and I've never understood what they're talking about because I don't know what kind of style I have! I've said everything the best way it sounded to me. I've been compared to Hemingway a couple of times. But he rarely used metaphor or simile. Stylistically, I know that some of my stories are much too

**"...a man will find himself ostracized if he's really good at what he does."**

**"...people (will) work in committees but not with a guy who is really good!"**

conscious.

**Amazing:** If you have been stylistically influenced in anything, I can't help but see a Hemingway approach in your boxing novel, *The Broken Place*.

**Shaara:** I studied the Hemingway style. I've taught about it in my creative writing classes. I can point out about fifteen things that are different between his and mine. I think what you're getting at is that the character in *The Broken Place* resembles the Hemingway Main Character who is very consistent. Hemingway's central character was himself in almost every thing he ever did. The character in *The Broken Place* is me, mainly. Hemingway also wrote about fighting. There are other similarities, but the main stylistic influence on me was Thomas Wolfe. When I was in my twenties I thought Wolfe was fantastic. Look at *Look Homeward Angel*—you don't know where he is going (you're not sure if there's a plot) but his characters and his language are so fine!

Getting back to Hemingway, I read him extensively. When I was starting to write, around eighteen or nineteen years old, there were a few things that really got to me, a few times when I was so moved I cried. King Lear was one. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* was another.

**Amazing:** Are there any science fiction writers who influenced your career?

**Shaara:** I like several science fiction writers very much. Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* is probably best written. But the style Bradbury has is simply not mine... If you read "Death of the Hunter," I think you'll see its style is more

like Faulkner than any sf writer. Heinlein's a good writer. He's a consistent writer which Bradbury isn't.

**Amazing:** You have the same attitude that Campbell and Heinlein have—that too much peace may be bad; that a man doesn't really learn about himself until he is under pressure and has to fight to survive.

**Shaara:** It's not just fighting in the simple meaning of the term. I am talking about the need for struggle in my stories. Life is struggle. Life is progress.

**Amazing:** Your civil war novel deals with what I'm talking about: man and war.

**Shaara:** Yeah.

**Amazing:** In all of your work, there seems to be a pattern.

**Shaara:** I feel that I'm on a path and each of my stories is a step taken further along the path. And it's a funny thing, but my stories seem to be moving back in time all the while. My first stories took place in the far future, then moved to the nearer future. My first novel was in the present, *The Broken Place*. My second novel took place in the past, *The Killer Angels*, about the Civil War; about Gettysburg. The third is back in the present again, or the near future perhaps, *The Herald*. But now I'm playing with the idea of a novel about the history of a certain family starting back at the time of the first guy with the bow and arrow. I start in the future and wind up in the past. It's kind of strange.

**Amazing:** What do you think of the idea that a writer has one story that he tells over and over again?

**Shaara:** I think it's basically true. But it's a funny thing with me—one critic told me I write in too many different genres, always moving all over the place, not settling down and making a mark in one area. I wonder what it would be like if I'd stayed with sf over the years. One day H.L. Gold offered me 2500 bucks for any science fiction novel I'd write for him. I never got around to writing it.

Bob Sheckley and I were buddies back then; we got together all the time. He remarked one day that some other sf writers were getting nervous about me because I was writing for the *Post* and

other top paying markets. I was just writing whatever interested me at the time.

**Amazing:** Have you kept up with sf since you left the field?

**Shaara:** I've kept up with the field a little. Saw *2001* and it's a great movie, one of the best I've ever seen! Bradbury, as I said before, is a marvelous writer. Ted Sturgeon is good. I read an article on writing by Ellison once, and I didn't agree with him at all.

Bob Sheckley is a very prolific writer, you know. I remember that he told me he'd write a short story once a week. He'd get down five thousand words, whether good, bad or indifferent. Fred Pohl advised that kind of writing. Fifty stories a year! I tried it. But it didn't come out. I write about, oh, seven stories a year.

**Amazing:** Getting back to the idea that there's a pattern in your stories, I read one about a company that will research your past, tell you who your ancestors were...The story's "Man of Distinction," about Genealogy Inc. It seems to tie in with the rest of your work very well, in terms of the pattern.

**Shaara:** Well, let me tell you about the pattern, the whole thing. I'm trying to grow out of the period I'm in. A child looks forward. An adult also looks back. I'm trying to look at the whole picture. To begin to detect as you get older what's permanent and what's not is such an important question. It's the main question.

Like I said the other day about Shakespeare...take *Romeo and Juliet*—why is it such a tremendous love story, still as powerful after four hundred years? What about it, other than the magnificent language, hits you right? Look at all of Shakespeare's work! What was the big difference about what he was saying. What makes something permanent?

**Amazing:** I think this question is at the heart of all your best fiction. Am I right in assuming that the science fiction stories at the beginning of your career posed this question about permanence, particularly your best mapping command stories like "The Book," and now, after more than a decade, you've written a novel to provide



the answer?

**Shaara:** Yes. *The Herald* is about what's permanent in mankind, what's important! I think the answer may scare a lot of people. We are trying to find out what we are; what we can control and what we can't. That's the issue.

**Amazing:** Your stories have a strong feeling of fatalism. Is writing more instinctive or conscious with you?

**Shaara:** I'm not sure. I just write what comes to mind. I think much of talent is unconscious. Ninety percent of the creative work is done before I write it down. My mind is always working on one story or another, back in some compartment, and then when I'm ready to write, it comes out.

I see three basic talents in writing. First, you've got to tell a good story. Second, the language you use is very important. The great writers are the ones who used great language, like Shakespeare. Everything he wrote you quote. Tone is very important—it's part of choosing the right words. Too many writers leave out the trees and the sky. You want to know what the weather was like. Third, there's characterization! You've got to have people. You can be good in the other two categories, but what good is it if you don't know how to handle characterization? This is Ayn Rand's greatest weakness. She's a strong writer, but she doesn't have people in her novels. She preaches too much...although I do admire *The Fountainhead*.

**Amazing:** Do you go along with Rand's idea of the innovator and the second-hander; of history perceived as a conflict between the two forces?

**Shaara:** Pretty much. You can see that in my stories. It's the Frankenstein sort of thing I show in *The Herald*—how the public is afraid of the scientist. Our society is getting so a man will find himself ostracized if he's really good at what he does. There's a tendency for groups to get together, for people to work in committees but not to work with a guy who is really good! Ever notice how the dumbest kids are the nicest kids? You know why we like to watch Laurel and Hardy? They make everybody else feel superior.

**“The genius concept makes people who want to belong to the crowd very nervous.”**

---

**Amazing:** How did *The Herald* come about?

**Shaara:** The idea began to occur to me in the summer of 1970. The first novel I wrote had been to understand myself, *The Broken Place*. The second novel was to understand the historical figures of Lee, Longstreet, Chamberlain and Stuart, *The Killer Angels*. But *The Herald* wasn't to understand people. It was written to understand a situation.

I had been studying genetics for quite a while. I've always had an interest in it. From my experience as a teacher and a cop I learned that the difference between people—the fundamental inequality—is so much greater than I ever expected. The general weakness of man is so much greater than we want to believe. Just consider what makes a genius. How much of that is genetic, how much social?

**Amazing:** You believe that intelligence is genetically determined?

**Shaara:** Yes. It is genetic. That's what *The Herald* is all about.

**Amazing:** *The Herald* has a classic horror feeling all the way through. What happens to the town, Jefferson, (the novel's name for where Shaara lives, Tallahassee. BL) makes me think of what happened in John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos*, *Village of the Damned*. It's a terrifying concept...the genetics weapon. Do you believe it is feasible?

**Shaara:** Yes. It will be the next one after the nuclear bomb.

**Amazing:** You are implying in *The Herald* that if any governments had gotten ahold of the weapon, there might have been racial warfare! A racist cabal in power could calibrate the machine to eliminate whole groups of people, but what you depict in your book, horrible as it is—

the *fantastic* number of deaths—provides an alternative because there's no racism in it (at least as we understand the term). Are you really so pessimistic about mankind that you think genocidal holocaust or *The Herald's* questionable solution would be the only possible outcomes?

**Shaara:** Yes. There would be no choice but *The Herald*. We're talking about the human race. As I've grown older, I've become very cynical about mankind in general.

Let me put it to you this way. I was told by one of my agents that during the Korean War, or right prior to it, her husband was a pilot in the Air Force—he was of some standing—and he told her that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had met with the President during a very severe situation. They voted whether or not to hit Russia and China with the A-Bomb. The vote was four to three against. That's the story I was told. If it had been up to me, at that time, I would have voted against it. Now, with what I know, I would vote for it.

*The Herald* is about the coming of a new world. Perhaps it would be a better world.

**Amazing:** What do you think of the argument against visionaries such as yourself that a world of geniuses could never come about? And what about the idea that to want everyone to be brilliant is just to desire another sort of equality as your ideal?

**Shaara:** What surprises me most about the argument concerning the types of people is the comment that I've heard repeatedly from different people that geniuses would all be identical; they'd be too much like each other, but it's common man who is separate and different. What's interesting to me is that it's exactly the opposite! Take two great composers side by side, like Mozart and Beethoven, two absolute greats and yet so very different. Or look at Michelangelo and Da Vinci, true geniuses, totally unique.

People are scared. It's a subject most people don't want to think about. Many scientists who are interested in genetic engineering are not saying race makes the difference. They say intelligence is

genetically determined, but that can mean black, white, yellow genius...Some theorize that race may tend to make people think differently from each other, but not necessarily better or worse. It's a complicated subject. But anybody who is interested in genetic engineering is called a racist!

Some men and women use the idea of equality as a weapon. They insist there can be no genius. The genius idea did not grow until recently. Socrates reached the conclusion that artistic talent was divine. Later on the idea became that it was disease—you act funny, you get put away. The idea of genius didn't really form until much later, the idea that one man can be so much different from others. The genius concept makes people who want to belong to the crowd very nervous.

B.F. Skinner is supposed to be intelligent, but he says you're the way you are because of the social environment. How does he account for genius?

I've let some of the professors around here (Florida State University) read *The Herald* in manuscript form and they've told me it scares them, that they think it's a dangerous book. I've been called a fascist.

**Amazing:** But you're so critical of government!

**Shaara:** I don't care that much about labels.

**Amazing:** Do you expect critical opposition from most quarters?

**Shaara:** Yes, of course.

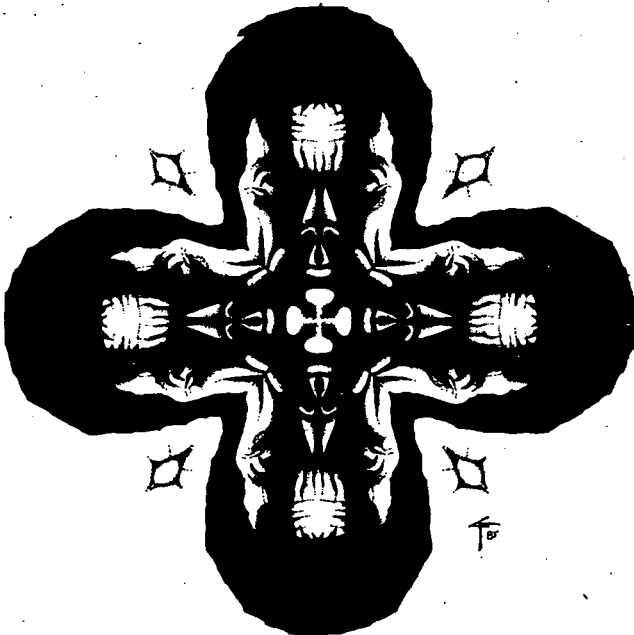
**Amazing:** Are you worried that *The Herald* may give you a bad reputation?

**Shaara:** No.

## THE DISTANCES BETWEEN

It's not the stars you know  
Oh, no  
The distances, the leagues,  
There is the intrigue  
The compounded hope.  
We are like fisherman, not sailors.  
Or, better still, boys fishing at night  
By lanternlight  
The moon at our backs—our solar nest—  
Aflame in the sky  
Our lanterns show us that  
Way to the creek bed as fins of  
Passing catfish cut through the light  
Cometlike.  
I wish they were a billion times  
Farther out,  
Routed by that initial blast of primal fire  
Then, and from then on,  
The fishing would never end,  
The hope never hooked.

—Ted Mancuso



# parke godwin marvin kaye

---

## WINTERMIND

---

Don't you feel old goddess  
Turned year-wheel all too fast?  
Don't you guess the Shando  
Seen just about the last  
Of Goddess bringing summer 'round  
In Sinjin green and flower crown?  
—late Shando folksong

### Introduction

In *The Masters of Solitude* (Doubleday, 1978), Garick, leader of the telepathic forest covens, waged his war against extinction and secured the opening of the technologically advanced City to his own people. His son, Arin and Arin's wife, Shalane, both coven masters, were prominent in the battles that tipped the scales toward survival for the coven people of Shando, Karli, Wengen and Suffec.

*Wintermind*, the second volume of the trilogy, begins ten years afterward. Arin and Shalane are now god and goddess of the small coven enclave in City. Their daughter Mady is a brilliant child—all coven by blood, all City by training. But Shalane is unhappy, unable to adapt to City ways, unable to see that the isolated, idyllic world of Circle she knew no longer exists.

Still, despite the dangers of travel, she wants more than anything else to take

Mady home to Karli for the mid-summer festival of Sinjin.

In Spitt's diary (from *Wintermind*) there is perhaps the clearest and most prophetic description of Shalane. She was nineteen when Spitt first saw her, fresh from Dannyline, the final battle of Garick's war. "...even without tabard or thammay knife, you know a master of Circle by their stance and gliding, silent tread. The stamp of their discipline is on them like a brand. Shalane was not a beautiful woman. Her features, like Arin's, were too inbred and extreme for handsomeness. Just under six feet, she was rather short by coven standards; still there was about her that wild-deer grace that deepwoods women have...

"Like the rest of her folk, Shalane had no clear idea of what actually had been accomplished at Dannyline, what enormous changes would follow..."

Excerpted from *Wintermind* forthcoming from Doubleday



**Illustration by Gary Freeman**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wintermind 29

**G**arick's campaign against the roving bands of cowan hunters was brief, bloody and one-sided. Once and for all, they had to exterminate or drive them out of Uhia. The constabulary force used a coven tactic developed against the merks in the battle of Karli Forest, early in Garick's war. Female riders let themselves be seen on foot, alone and unarmed. Cowans naturally pursued them. The women fled in convincing terror, eventually allowing themselves to be caught and surrounded by the cowan hunters—who then had a life expectancy of a minute or less.

Some people, cowan and coven alike, called this cold-blooded. Not all cowan hunters committed crimes against Circle folk. Some were men who just preferred a solitary forest life, much like the Suffec.

But others, like Santee's gang, were dangerous as pack dogs. When Garick's constab all but wiped out Ben Santee's large band, the only national regret was that Santee and a few others escaped.

Santee's origins are obscure, though Fleeters say he came from the Shortree part of the Fist—which is their name for that cape they live on far up in the Wengen northeast. Santee could write a little—he may have learned it from Kriss leader, Uriah. Anyway, Santee was proud of his accomplishment, and now and then hesent Garick misspelled, taunting notes. Rashevsky guessed him some sort of psychotic.

Whatever, Santee was slippery. The trap that sprang on his band didn't catch him or a handful of his closest friends. But the boy he loved was massacred by the constab.

A week later, a constab rider found a message to Garick written on a peel of birch bark and nailed to a tree.

YOUR NOT SMART ENUF TO  
CATCH ME GARICK.  
YOU KILL MORE THAN I EVER DID.  
ILL GET YOU FOR THIS WERE IT  
HURTS.

BEN SANTEE

And he meant it.

Shalane stirred in the depths of the night, disturbed by Arin's muted men. Though still asleep, he thrashed fitfully.

Again.

Even after ten years, it wouldn't fade. A master long before Arin, Shalane could read it easily in her husband's mind, the dark nightmare of the first time he had to kill: the boy Holder, potentially infected with plague, a threat to his own people. But Holder was a Shando, and no-one ever ended life within Circle. It was bad enough killing a cowan when you had to, but among your own kind, it was unthinkable. Arin was the first, and the price was that the bad dream never went away. Sometimes the Holder-memory left him alone for months at a time, but eventually it returned. Arin was never really quit of it, the same invariable scene flickering through his dormant, captive mind like one of those City—magic newsreels—the arrow slamming Holder back and back against the tree as his eyes sought Arin's, staring in pain and shock, unable to believe the act or the coming of death like a swift shadow over the sun.

Arin groaned and writhed slightly under the light covers. Shalane caressed him with her mind and hands, feeling the cold sweat that stood out on his hard shoulder. Gently, as she'd done once with Corian, Shalane enfolded Arin's mind in her own to nudge him not away from life but only deeper into dreamless sleep. The nightmare ebbed, left him limp. His clenched jaw relaxed, leaving only those lines on his face that had been deep-cut there by another ordeal than Holder's death.

Shalane read his mind now; it was at rest, the way a silent room sounds to the ear. She lay back to recapture her own sleep, but it was a long time coming.

She woke with the first cautious birds, opening her eyes in the familiar warm hollow of Arin's shoulder, and for a little while, the agony and bitter memories were gone. His hand brushed lightly over her cheek, aware of her even in sleep. She eased up one elbow; Arin sighed and turned over. Shalane watched her husband, studying him for perhaps the millionth time, yet always somehow just like the first: at the great, slender length of his body, the reddish hair like his mother Jenna's, the



awkward set of the arm broken so long ago by command of the dead Kriss leader, Uriah.

Shalane put the thought away. She had her own memory of the Kriss, and even after ten years, she could not forget the death-smell and the blood-sticky touch of her own hands.

She watched Arin sleep. It was one of her secret pleasures. She knew Arin did it, too, and both knew the other was aware, a loving game to share and keep secret at the same time.

Her mind went out to read her small daughter in the next room, opening to grasp at energies delicate as flower scents. Mady was still asleep: Shalane's family was safe at rest. That much at least contented her, though it was little enough.

She slid out of bed, reaching for the red robe on the nearby chair, then frowned at the garment. *Getting bad as a City woman*, she thought, putting clothes between herself and the sun first thing out of bed. Shalane draped the robe over one arm and moved out of the white room to a door, pressed a button—*no end to City junk*—and heard a faint hum as the panel slid back. *Like I'm too helpless to open it myself*. She looked in on her child.

Mady lay curled around her pillow, her little white nightgown covering all but her head and tiny feet. A few of her toys lay on the floor, logic-toys, Arin called them, games for solving certain kinds of problems. Some of them Mady brought home from school, but most were presents from Marian Singer and many of them (Marian said) very old, once belonging to some other City child. Once Shalane asked Arin, "What's a logic?" and wondered why he laughed.

Watching Mady asleep in bed, a smile whispered over Shalane's lips. Awake, her daughter never sat still for long, but now—there was a word Shalane's old friend Jay Kriss once used when smiling down on Mady in the presence of the child's parents. *Angelic*.

Shalane thought about her own girlhood in Karli. *Did I sleep that good when I was nine?* She figured she must've, but couldn't remember. Sure as frost didn't ball herself up in a nightgown, but Mady didn't have her mother's feel for going bare, partly because

weather gets sharp in the northern parts of City, but that wasn't the real reason.

*Mady isn't deepwoods*. As simple as that. And it hurt Shalane. Ever since City opened and she and Arin settled inside its endless borders, she'd lost so much and couldn't even share her memories with her child. Shalane, practically born riding, used to break horses, but Mady never rode, and Mady never hog-greased in winter, and Mady didn't know the deep good taste of coven food home-cooked before it was a half a day out of the ground. The one Fire-Day she'd spent at home, Mady was too young to remember.

*Mady isn't deepwoods*. And it wasn't just being far away from Karli or Charzen, it was deeper, it was Arin letting Mady learn from City folk who stuffed their heads and stuffed that damn box with everything but the gifts that only come from Goddess Earth. And mostly it was Marian Singer, supposed to be busy running City but stealing time every day to personally teach Mady City ways.

*Mady isn't deepwoods*. City teaching turned Shalane's baby into a cool, self-possessed girl. Yet her lep was as strong as any at home. It would reach as far as Shalane's some day, a formidable weapon if needed, but the other half, the *sharing*, was not there. Mady didn't share, didn't pass feelings back and forth and wouldn't allow either her mother or father to touch her mind without permission. She simply shut them out when they tried. Thus Shalane found a small, tender joy in feeling lightly at the edges of Mady's essence in those few moments before her child woke.

At last, Shalane pressed the button again and the panel slid shut. She continued down the hall through the main living room and into the kitchen beyond, a room that represented City's attempt to compromise between the constrictive local dietary regimen and the simple, yet immensely varied food of the coveners.

No matter how Shalane tried, City words kept creeping in. She was thinking about breakfast and what it might be. Powdered eggs? Fish soo-flay? C-concentrate? The last for sure; Marian Singer always nagged her to include it in all their morning meals, and it wasn't bad.

She stared without love at the electronic

wall oven, the range, the mixers and blenders, the cutters and shapers that timed and weighed and cooked and spiced and sauced and stirred and poured and served, and the result still lacked something for Shalane. Everything in the kitchen was powered like the rest of the house from a central box that caught and saved up sunrays, turning them into energy. Shalane's mother, Maysa, was so proud when Moss brought her a wood-burning stove from Lorl, and it was the only one in Karli. How Maysa would have loved a City kitchen!

Or would she? City people ate like masters, dab of this, bitty hunk of that, sip of something else, all of it tasting like it was cooked last grannog, and maybe it was. And you couldn't bring home-food into City past the Decon stations. All the coveners tried; it was a kind of game after going home to come back with real coven food to share around. The merk guards caught most of it, but Shalane could usually get through with a taste of coon or enough horsemint or goldenrod hidden under her hair to go one or two pots of tea.

Shalane smiled. Corian was the one to see if you craved home-food. He was always running back and forth, in and out of City, carrying doctor things that the guards never tried to search, and—

And yes. Shalane opened the refrigerator. She'd forgotten; one dozen fresh-laid eggs from a chicken still clucking around Lorl somewhere. A sly present from little Spitt.

She poured distilled water into a pan and set it to boil on the solar stove. When it was ready, she dropped the eggs in, disdaining the timer bell that could measure the desired four minutes precisely. Shalane didn't need a bell, she could feel four minutes. But City people always let things work for them, like the screen over the stove that changed each day to tell the new date and exact time. But as easy as a Karli woman could tell the right days for starting babies, any covener knew what day it was now: eighteen more before Sinjin. Why give them all names?

Shalane spooned up her eggs, ate them moodily with a glass of C-concentrate. Diane Radclif said the tart liquid prevented colds. Shalane had to ask what a cold was,

but the stuff did wake up her mouth all right.

0525. City people lived almost forever, and they had a saying that *forever is in the future*, but even though they had more time than anyone ought to want, they still acted like they never had enough. Shalane couldn't ever figure them out. They pushed themselves and wrote and studied and thought up ways to gain more time. They named the centuries and individual years and months and days *'n even the goddam minutes*. This one was 0525-turning-over-now-to-0526, and who cared? The sun slanted early green shadows over the wooded park around their house, and it would be a lovely spring day, but Shalane doubted Marian Singer's people would notice.

Ten years in City. Ten years in a tiny joke of a manmade forest, a park with trees and green and water but with City towering all around it like grownups around a baby's pen. Not as many buildings as down by Marian Singer's work-room, but no matter which way you looked you could still see one or more of them.

*Why do we have to live here? Why can't we go home?*

Because Arin was his father's voice inside City, and like always, Shalane reflected bitterly, *Garick wants and Arin does*. In the early days, before Dannyline, Garick's needs cost Arin the proper use of his arm and almost got him born again. Worse, Garick's mission to the Kriss nearly drove Arin mad, and the smell of that journey still haunted Shalane's husband. There were days, especially when the thin rains of spring fell, when Arin closed himself off and nobody could reach him, not even Mady.

Shalane stopped by the mirror wall in the living room. She didn't often stand there for long, but today, maybe because of her mood, she dropped the robe and subjected her image to a minute scrutiny without knowing truly what she looked for.

Twenty-nine.

*Arin says I'm not a day older. He just don't know where to look.* Time left its track on her like everyone else. In the mirror, her lip curled. Marian Singer seemed younger, but there were probably

full-grown trees in Karli not half as old as her. Shalane moved closer to the glass. The planes of her face flowed more smoothly into each other now, softer compared with ten years ago, and her mouth fit better around those big front chipmunk teeth. Her hair was not dulled at all, still corn-yellow and uncut since Dannyline, covering her small breasts and falling over her flat stomach. *Well...not so flat since Mady.* Little pale stretch marks from birthing the child crept up her loins. The knees didn't knob out or the elbows jut so bony-sharp as when she was young. She didn't smell of horse any more, either.

At least the mirror gave her back a subtle curve where once there were mostly angles. Shalane smiled thinly at the image. In an hour or so, she'd choose a clean robe, cover it carefully with a tabard, wind the cord belt around it and set the antler crown on her head. Around her neck she'd wear the moon-sigil passed on to her from Jenna, taken by Garick from the dead goddess' throat at Dannyline. Shalane's lips twisted momentarily. *We won, but what?* The question was bitter ash in her memory.

Putting away the thought, she conjured the mental picture of the morning's coming work when she sat beside Arin as goddess of this strange little City-locked coven made up solely of masters. Her duties were all religious now. *Religious. Religion.* More City words. All the masters would be fresh from baths like herself. Not one would smell of rawhide or earth, not one would show a smidge of paint from hunting, a trace of forest-color missed by the hasty wash with fat-soap...

Sometimes Shalane felt like a fool for her home-yearnings; things weren't all that good back there. There were lean years and sickness and children that wouldn't come painlessly or whole like Mady. And after all, Arin still loved her just as much as ever, only—

*Only no more children. Not in this place.*

Their house sat in a cool nook of the park, five minutes walk from the main coven dormitory. The Mrikan control group was housed in a structure built in the middle of a wide meadow. At first, there was no mixing between the two peoples, but ten

years can rub off a lot of difference, Shalane admitted.

The Mrikan students were young, all smart and curious like Arin and her friend, Bern, and they included one or two no-lep Wengens like Corian. In the initial testing by Diane Radclif, both groups began with hostile competition, but soon gentled down to a friendlier rivalry and a gradual realization among the coveners that, in some ways, Mrikans weren't so different from Circle. They could be happy, they felt pain, they cared about their parents and children, could even be kind and helpful. Some of them still believed in an old dead god like the Kriss, but Mrikans didn't kill folks over it. Arin, who was always reading now, said their name came down from a time way behind yesterday when it was a pride to be *American* in a land ruled by Jings.

"We were all Mrikans way back then," Arin surmised. "No difference at all."

Arin said too many Circle folk couldn't see an inch beyond their own covenstead. "And you too, Lane. You're the thickest deepwoods that ever was. I tell you, it's hard to hate someone once you get to know him."

Shalane didn't know about that. Mrikans weren't all that bad, but there was still something inside her that wouldn't bend. The line was drawn thousands of year-wheels back and stamped on a covener at birth. You were Circle or cowan, one or the other. And cowans were different, Shalane knew. She had her own nightmares from time to time, and when she saw her husband's arm flung over the blanket in that twisted way because it never set right after the Kriss broke it, she remembered the deep difference. And some of it was counted in all those shallow graves dug by her people between Karli Forest and Dannyline.

Climbing nimbly up the side of a long boulder, Shalane slipped off her robe once more so she could bathe in the early sun. Out in the meadow, no Mrikans stirred outside their big, square house, it was still too early. She laid down the robe for a blanket and stretched out, listening to the toy forest around her. Flowers swaying in the morning breeze, opening to the sun.

Squirrels rustling branches. Birds chattering, the snap of a twig—

Her eyes opened when she heard the twig break. Shalane's senses probed toward the newcomer, brushing aside the familiar sounds to feel at the approaching presence. She fixed on him, identified him at once, long before he bobbed through the trees with his rapid, unbalanced gait.

Shalane turned her head and watched him come. Near nine years he'd been walking on the new foot Rashevsky gave him, yet he still threw his weight to one side as if leaning on the long-gone crutch.

In spite of Arin's position, Corian was the real link between Circle and cowans, welcome at both tables. In City, he was always bounding after Rashevsky for more medical supplies or knowledge, bickering with or propositioning Diane Radclif, getting in Marian Singer's hair. He was one of the first cowans Shalane ever really liked. Sometimes it puzzled her why Corian never settled down with one woman, didn't even stay in one bed long enough to get the blankets warm. Arin said Corian loved women, Arin said Corian didn't trust them to stay, to be real. To be something he could hold onto.

She waved lazily at the small figure. "Hey."

His head swiveled up to find her.

"Up here on the rock."

He nodded. "Goddess Shalane, I was on the way to your house."

"Arin and Mady are still asleep. Stop and sit."

He clambered up the side of the long rock, thrusting his black medical bag before him. No telling where he'd been for the past two weeks, but his bag was always with him. His narrow face was shadowed with beard, but the green hospital suit was fresh, probably put on at the checkpoint Decon station when Corian came in.

Shalane slipped into her robe, more for Corian's sake than her own. There was enough cowan in him not to accept a bare woman with Circle ease. Some part of him always had to do something about it right then and there, like loving the crib girls he doctored.

Corian flopped down beside her with a

grunt.

"Where you been so long?" she asked.

"Karli, giving shots, couple of babies."

Her eyes brightened. "You were home? Sure as frost? How is it, how's Moss?"

"Your father's fine," Corian reassured her. "Sends his love. I didn't have much time there. Lep came through from Garick right in the middle of a tough delivery. Shouldn't have been so hard. Third child, but the uterus prolapsed. Was I busy? Dunesk. Garick wants me to take a med mission up to the Fleeters." Corian grinned at Shalane. "You'd like the Fleeters, goddess. Real old time Circle, like the Karli. I've lived with them. Sea folk, sell a lot of fish to City."

Shalane made a face. "So that's where they get all that fish."

"Fleeters live out on a hook of land not far from the north end of City. It looks like an arm." He crooked his arm and made a fist. "See that? That's what they call it. The Fist."

But Shalane wanted to hear about Karli. "Tell about home instead. They all getting ready for Sinjin?"

"Nobody talks about anything else, goddess. Lot more people coming and going now. Ass-deep in kids, but Sinjin's the same."

"Eighteen days from now," Shalane dreamed wistfully, chin on her knees. "Folks coming in from all over, boys and girls picking each other out for the hill, just like me and Arin once. Cooking, meat hanging in the springhouse." Shalane breathed deep. "I can almost taste it."

Corian chuckled. "So, would I forget?" He opened his black bag. "I tell those checkpoint mofos this bag's so full of disease they could die just looking inside. So they don't bother me. Here we are." He lifted out a transparent pouch. Through the clear material Shalane saw the leaf-and-cornhusk wrapping.

"Oh!" She clapped her hands like a delighted child. "Cory, you're so good." She hugged him impulsively. "Open, quickquick, let me smell."

"Moss sent it," Corian tore open the plastic. "Just some greens and corn, a little cooked pork."

But it was more than that to her, he knew. "It's home, you can smell it." Shalane put

the corn to her nose, inhaling deeply. "Nothing in City got any smell. City people forgot how. They see something like this and all they think is it's something they got to keep out or some dumb bitty germ they can't see anyway is gonna get 'em. But I can read this corn and where it's been."

Corian liked the way the excitement lit her face. "Tell me."

"I can smell the field they grew it in: fallow last year, sown with clover and turned under, nothing like clover to fresh up tired earth. And there's the block salt they crushed up into spring water when they cooked it." She ran her tongue over the ear. "Spooned possum dripping on it. Mmm. And look! Someone was baking pone in mama's old iron stove, 'n Moss or somebody grabbed a piece to eat and dropped these crumbs, and—"

Shalane choked off, full of more feeling than she could speak. Corian sensed the conflicting emotions that welled in her. She said in a low voice, "You were good to bring it."

"Goddess?" Corian hovered over her awkwardly. Sensitive to pain, it tore him up to see anyone suffer. He touched her arm tentatively. Sometimes Shalane wondered about his shyness toward her, a physical reticence that extended to no other woman. Perversely, it irritated her now. She needed to be touched and held and left alone at the same time and she wanted, she wanted—

"Goddess, what is it?"

"Nothing."

Corian sat down next to her, rummaging his bag for nothing in particular. You ought to go home," he said after a long silence. "For a little while at least. It's been so long, and you..."

Shalane read the thought he left unfinished. "I don't fit in here, never did."

Corian ducked his head in agreement. "Then why do you stay?"

"Oh, Cory." As if she hadn't tortured herself with the same question for so long, as if there were an answer. She shrugged, defeated. "Arin's so different now, sometimes I think he'd be happy never going home. Always reading, always off in his head somewhere. But he stays, and I'm with Arin. You know *with*, Corian, how

deep it goes. I smile with his happiness, I can hurt with his pain. And I want my little girl."

Abruptly, Shalane picked up the food and rose. "Have to get home."

Corian stood up with her, lightly grasped her arm. "Listen to the doctor, Shalane. Go home for Sirjin. Take Mady, she's old enough to understand it now."

Shalane vented a short, sardonic laugh. "Old Singer woman would love to see me go, but taking Mady would be a fight."

Corian knew the disturbing truth of that. To any rational observer, Marian was much too possessive of a child not her own. He considered the problem, wondering what shrewd old horse traders like Garick or Spitt would do. Shalane couldn't handle Marian, neither could he, but perhaps it could be managed through the back door.

"Let me try something, goddess. Maybe I can get you and Mady home for Sirjin."

Her old chipmunk smile widened her mouth in a flash. "Real?" You could?"

He spread his hands. "Who else? I know how things are run around here. Promise."

Or he hoped it could be. In this city of miracles, Corian knew someone who knew someone else who might just work a big one.

Arin was awake when Shalane got back to the bedroom from her talk with Corian. Arms behind his head, red hair tousled from sleep, he grinned up at her and Shalane smiled and dropped the silly robe on a chair. She shared a silent greeting with Arin. They still had that.

Hey.

Without his beard, he looked even more like his mother, Jenna. None of her hardness, though, Arin was never that way. Shalane remembered Jenna as a great sleek cat of a woman, and time lent the same suppleness to Arin's body, giving contour and smoothness to what had once been drawn too taut and fine. A big, lazy cat like his mother, but gentle in contrast to the old goddess' iron, and more content than Jenna, whose heart hid a secret pain all her life.

Yet for a long time after Dannyline, there were things in Arin that Shalane couldn't read, and even now sometimes she caught that faintly remote quality that reminded her of Garick and perhaps more of Arin's

strange half-brother, Singer. Arin rarely mentioned him and never in Garick's presence.

Like her own father Moss, Arin grew moody when the rain carried a fetid smell from the flats crossriver. Then her husband would close up in himself, apart, untouchable. When Arin was that way, Shalane could only wait till he came back and took what solace he could in his family. She knew she and Mady filled at least one of the empty places in him, and yet...

And yet things were not as good as ten years ago when their minds and bodies were like one. There were rifts now, petty hidings, tiny turnings away, spaces to be filled and shared but left empty. Shalane didn't know how to hide things or be so alone, but more and more, she had to. Oh, they loved each other as much as ever, but the spaces kept getting bigger. A lot of little stones added up to a landslide in enough time, and she and Arin were on boats drifting apart while they reached and strained for each other.

She slid into bed with him. "Hey."

"Hey, Lane."

They lay close together, legs intertwined. She wanted him to love her and push his head urgently down to her breasts, but Arin hesitated as the small lep whispered into their minds, gentle but insistent.

*Mommadad.*

Arin sought his wife's mind. *Mady's up.*

Her hands kneaded his hair, moved down his stomach to grasp his penis. *Don't care. Love me.*

She'll come in.

"Let her!" Shalane said too sharply. "I used to see Moss and Maysa all the time. What's wrong with that?"

Arin hauled himself up on one elbow. "Mady's not deepwoods, Lane. She was born in City, not used to seeing people loving. She can't handle it yet."

Shalane stiffened. "Can't 'handle' it? What kind of goddam City talk is that, Arin? You learn that from Singer-woman?"

He didn't answer.

"Maybe," she protested, "just maybe if Mady went back home and saw how good it is, what she is, where she came from, she'd be able to 'handle' it better. She expected an argument, but when Arin encouraged her with a kiss, she went on. "Saw Corian

this morning. He's been to Karli. Says they all getting ready for Sinjin. Corian thinks I should take Mady back to see it."

She chilled with the realization: *there, it happened again. I said it, and Arin knows.* Close as they were, each caught the determined / that used to be we. And like in the sleepwatching game, each knew and pretended not to notice.

"It might be a good thing," Arin agreed.

*Mommadad.*

The panel hummed open. Mady trailed into the room, rubbing her eyes with two small fists. "H'lo."

Arin held out his arms. "Housebuilding time, punkin, let's go."

Almost every morning they had this short time together, the three of them. Mady would climb into bed with her parents, hiding under the covers while they looked everywhere for her, grabbing at their toes or making a house out of both of them and snuggling underneath.

The nightgown hiked up over her long skinny legs as she clambered onto the bed. *So pretty*, Shalane thought. *More'n I ever was.* Whatever City put into Mady's head, her body was pure coven, all the signs were there, the thin torso like a tube, legs and elbows like a new-foaled horse, out-sized hands and feet that the rest of her wouldn't catch up with for years. From the length of her thigh, they guessed Mady would grow tall as Jenna, well over six feet. The child's hips and tiny bottom were almost nonexistent now; like her kind, she wouldn't round much until she birthed a baby herself.

Mady took Garick's coloring, much darker than Arin or herself. The short chestnut hair sprang into curls that could be waves if Mady wore it longer, but she cut it short like City women. Her eyes were pure Maysa, but bright and sharp where Shalane's mother's were deep and warm. There was a coolness about Mady that disconcerted Shalane, a self-possession you could hear in her clipped, clear speech. No softness, not the sun-warmed lazy Shando drawl or Karli twang. And even when she wasn't a year old, Mady knew how to say no.

Shalane smoothed the crisp sheets over the little body. "Mady, know what's coming in eighteen days?"



Playing with Arin's hair, Mady puckered her brow. "June 21st."

"No, what else? You know. What do we do on that day every year?"

"Summer solstice, and the masters form a circle," the thin voice piped without much interest. She snuggled up to her father. He tickled her ribs and she giggled.

Shalane doggedly pursued the subject. "Maybe that's all we do here, punkin, but at home, they dance and sing and—oh, all kind of good things. And I want to take you back to see it this year."

Mady bit off the words with cool precision. "Marian won't let me go."

Shalane doggedly pursued the subject.

"Look, punkin. Marian's head of City, but your mama is a goddess, and there's nothing higher."

"Even grampa Garick?"

"Well...even he listens when a goddess talks. So if your mother says go—"

Mady flung up her hands in comic surrender. "We go!"

Arin nodded. "That's all the say you need."

Suddenly anxious to please her mother, Mady twisted around. "I was in Karli, mama."

Shalane laughed at the typical child-trick, telling well-known information to a forgetful grownup. "Oh yes, yes, yes, baby, but you were so little you couldn't remember." She buried her face in Mady's fragrant hair, rubbing her nose affectionately over the clean scalp. "I'll take you to see the new goddess of Karli. She'll want to meet the pretty girl—oh, the real pretty girl who just might wear my moon-sign someday, just like grandma Jenna left it to me..."

And Jenna had it from her own mother who was a master of Shando, killed defending a wagon train from pack dogs. The masters gave Jenna the sign and her mother's thammay, and what did Mady know about how it was? Mady would kneel to the Karli goddess and know in her bright head why the goddess wore an antler crown sometimes and a wreath of candles others, but she wouldn't know it in the deep, wordless way Shalane did. Maybe in Karli, when Mady saw the dancing done on the rutted earth, saw the loving and touching, heard the music...

"It's gonna be real Sinjin, Mady. People getting ready right now, coming in from all over Karli, cooking all kind of good things, you never saw such food. You'll clean bust with all of it. It's a special time for girls, too. Sinjin's smack in the middle of Goddess Earth's best time, and old Loomin-winter's far off as he can get. It's a growing time. Just like a woman, the earth's never so pretty as when it's getting ready to birth. It's a happy time. The young folks—not you this year, but soon, Mady, soon—they'll be out for the loving on the hill, and if it's first time, it'll be sweet and funny, too, because the first time always is, and—"

Shalane stopped, suddenly aware of the leak from her daughter's thoughts. Mady hadn't heard a word she said. Instead, she was silently prattling away to Arin with the fingers of both small hands flying, talking to him in City language. Shalane felt herself go cold with a growing anger.

That anger swelled as the oblivious silent dialogue went on. With great difficulty, she suppressed a desire to grab Mady's wrists and twist them hard.

**MADY!**

The child froze, stunned by the brutal force of the leap that slammed into her mind. The color drained from her face, her lower lip began to tremble. She stared up at her mother, frightened.

Rapt in the digital word-game, Arin looked up, too, startled, but Shalane didn't even spare him a glance.

*Mady—*

Timidly her daughter responded. ?

*Don't do that when I'm talking to you.*

"She's only playing, Lane." Arin's voice held a reproof that shamed her even more while it increased the anger she didn't understand herself.

"I don't care!" she snapped, her hands shaking.

"But I have to practice, mama," Mady started to whine. "Marian—"

"Not around me." Shalane's voice trembled suddenly. She was begging. Please.

Ben Santee tested the black knife against his left thumb and smiled when a drop of blood welled up at the contact. The secret of covener blades was very old. Wengens learned from the Jings how to make one

thin strip and sharpen it, then another and another, up to five or six, and hot-forged them together so there was maybe half-a-dozen cutting surfaces in one. He'd always wanted a witch-knife, so he made sure to take it from the coven woman they surprised when they stole into the stable to steal the horses.

He glanced coldly at her, struggling unsuccessfully with the ropes that bound her to the log. There was a gag in her mouth.

A little way off, Ritt squatted by the horses. Fat Gosset whittled at a piece of kindling, and the tow-haired boy, Lee, stared with vacant eyes and empty smile at the woman, both brown hands pushed down on his crotch, rubbing it the way he did in front of a fire or any time his hands weren't in use, spitting now and then, rocking back and forth. Rub-rub; Ritt sometimes wondered aloud how Lee didn't wear his cock clean off.

Gosset nudged the boy. "Like redheads, Lee? Maybe she's one of Red Jenna's kin."

The yellow-haired youth wrinkled his face in unaccustomed concentration. "Red Jenna? Do I know her?" He turned to Ben for information.

"She's long dead," Santee said remembering Garick's second wife. "Uriah's son stuck her at Dannyline."

Ben Santee was an old-fashioned man. But then Fist people, whether Shorttree, like him, or Fleeter, weren't much on change. They kept family names, proudly conscious of being descended in an unbroken line from Americans who fished the same waters long before the Jings came.

Most Shorttree Kriss got along with the coven Fleeters out of mutual advantage. They fished the same banks and must be helped in time of trouble, because you might need them in kind next day. There were some Shorttrees, though, who had Scripture-based reservations about mingling with witch people. The Santees were of that hard persuasion.

Never can tell about Fleeters, Ben mused. Shando or Karli, you got to where you could pretty well figure them out, but a Fleeter was different. He might talk to you,

he might not. When he did, you still felt that weird riptide sometimes under the calm surface. This was the Devil in them, Santee knew: made them look human while laughing at you underneath. So when he got drunk that time and killed the Fleeter in a flash of anger, Santee had to run south clear of the Fist. Not even his own people would shelter him.

But though he couldn't go home, he never forgot who he was or where he came from. He spent some time in the merks, wandered as far west as Salvation where he met the most important man in his life, the God-driven force named Uriah.

Santee respected Uriah as no-one else. Uriah had an iron mission and a hard soul fit for it, and someday he would rise up to crush the covens like bugs, as easily as Santee pushed the knife into the Fleeter. It wasn't like they were people.

But he didn't like Salvation, its crampy houses or working in a dark mine or hard-eyed elders telling him what to do and how and when to pray. Not Ben Santee who was used to the open sea with nothing between him and God.

So one day, when he was on a coal train to the Wengen iron works, he met a squat, silent man named Ritt. They deserted the wagons after a few days and drifted south into Shando country, living well off the land. Ritt knew the forest. He never said much, least of all where he came from, but Santee recognized Ritt as a man who made his own law.

They attracted others like them, men who couldn't settle down or get attached to one person or place before the restlessness set in. Coveners avoided them or shooed them off when they got too close. Once in a while, they robbed a coven wagon trail to Lorl, now and then they took a woman. Or each other. Santee discovered early that when the urge was on him, it didn't matter much. Man or woman, it was just a fever, a fury that needed to spend itself on another body.

And then he was thirty, and if he realized anywhere in his soul that his life was hardening in this mold, he accepted it and went on drifting.

Then, suddenly, a gale wind named Garick swept across his aimless course. Stomping all over the forest covens,

shaking them awake, dragging them to war...Garick the Anti-Christ. If you had any doubt about the evil in Garick or Red Jenna, you only had to remember what they did to Salvation. Their people murdered all the Kriss there, and Red Jenna personally stabbed Uriah to death. It was God's justice that the red-haired witch met her end at the hands of Uriah's son—though he, too, was killed at Dannyline. Garick reputedly did it with the help of his son's woman, Shalane. Another name to remember and hate.

In the glade, tow-headed Lee rubbed his crotch and stared at the tethered coven woman. Ritt squinted at the last of the sun fading through the tangle of forest to the west. He was worried.

But Ben Santee just stared at his hands and thought about his enemy, Garick.

By the end of Garick's war, Santee's band numbered about twenty-five men living a fairly easy life: south in the winter, north in the summer, hunting always good. But now the covens were all mixed together and riding with Mrikan merks, *did you ever hear such a thing?* and wiping out his kind like pack dogs. A Christian had no chance against that dirty lep of theirs. And now they used their women, stuck them out like bear-bait, and he told Rack and he told him about that trick.

Rack was just a boy, a sweet boy, maybe a little Suffec in him, but raised in Towzen. Smooth skin and a soft way of talking. It was the danger, not jealousy, that made Santee warn Rack off coven women, but the boy never listened.

Rack was with the main body of Santee's men when the constab sprang their trap. Santee found him among the others, throat cut, a great dark patch soaking into the leaves under his head. The constabs wouldn't even bury him. They only did that for their own.

*Not even human.*

He buried Rack two days back. It surprised Santee and trebled his unfamiliar grief that he couldn't leave, that he lingered hour after hour by the low mound.

"Ben...Ben?"

It was Ritt. Santee looked up.

"What?"

"One day here's smart. They wouldn't figure us to stay where it happened. But it's two days now. We got to move."

Santee paid no attention. "Get him for this," he said to himself. "Ent never heard a commandment so clear in my soul."

"We gotta move, Ben."

"Like the trumpet of the Lord hisself."

Santee stood up. Tall and stringy, he might pass for coven, except for the eyes that judged the world with the hard, unforgiving scrutiny of one who never doubted his reason or his right. "Been thinking on that," he finally answered Ritt. "Lee, Gosset, get over here."

Gosset, who'd just squatted next to the woman reluctantly heaved his fat frame off the log. Lee stopped rubbing. They drifted to join Santee and Ritt.

"We moving, Ben?" Lee grinned.

"Good idea," Gosset ventured. "Coven all around."

Ritt nodded, prying a thumbnail between his teeth. "Can't go south, they'll be waiting. West, might's well dig our own graves, we too close to Karli now. Just more riders east."

He let the thought trail off, watching Santee scuff a clear patch in the earth. They all knew the truth, even dim Lee. Nothing to stay in the forest for, except to get caught. The pickings weren't worth a shit now, and they didn't have a chance against constab in any numbers. They watched Santee draw in the earth with his new knife.

"I'm going home," he said.

They just stared at him. Santee never said that word before; they never thought of Ben as having a home to go to any more than they themselves did.

The knife went on moving in the dirt.

"You heard of the Fist? Summer's heaven, winter ent bad at all." The shape in the dirt looked like a bent arm with a small fist at the top. Santee poked a dot at the very top of the hand where the knuckles would be. "Where I come from. Shortree people; named after the way the trees get bent over by the wind and sand."

"Heard of 'em," Gosset allowed. "Fish folks."

"Best fishing in the world, Gossy. Used to run my own boat, sell catch to City. Long time ago," Ben mused. "Way long time ago. Guess I could go back now, no one remembers me." He looked up at the others. "Y'all don't have to come."

They shuffled, silent. Then Gosset spat. "Never had to do nothing, Ben. I'll come."

"Gonna be hard, Gossy," Santee warned, doubtfully looking at Gosset's belly. "North through Karli Forest."

Lee laughed his goatish bleat. "Shee-it, I'll go. You the best, Ben."

Santee smiled, a thin contour that didn't soften his colorless eyes. "You're a good boy, Lee. Always said so. Ritt?"

The squat man glanced around at the engulfing woods. One place was much like another to him. "North is best," he agreed. "Rough country, but it'll slow the constabs as much as us."

So it was decided. Gosset and Lee walked back to the trussed woman, but Santee and Ritt moved to care for their scrawny, worn-out horses.

Ritt shook his head. "These animals won't make it over Blue Mountains. We'll be eating horse before we get to Wengen territory."

"We'll get more," Santee said surely, tightening a cinch.

Ritt put an arm around Ben's shoulder. "North to the Fist. It's good sense, Ben. Thought for a bit you gonna let Garrick spook you with what happened to Rack."

Santee stared oddly at Ritt. Before he could answer him, Gosset interrupted.

"Hey, Ben, me 'n' Lee got time to do her proper?"

Santee approached the log and disinterestedly calculated how long he should permit Gosset and the boy to dawdle with the woman before they rode out. Making up his mind, he bent and plunged his black knife just below her left breast and ripped her open, slicing diagonally to a point a few inches above her right hip.

"Get her while she's warm."

Ritt watched numbly as Ben cleaned his knife and walked back over to him while Lee mounted the dying woman.

"I ain't gonna forget Garick," Santee said, gently stroking his horse's mane. "Where we pass, Garick's gonna know."

"EEEEFAA-HII!"

Shalane never knew how Corian did it, but there wasn't a boo out of Marian about taking Mady home. She felt wonderful. She shouted for pure glee. The weather, sunny and not too humid, accented her spirits. The park around their house was deep in green and flowers.

In the heady days before they left, Shalane packed and unpacked twice for herself and her bewildered daughter. Riding a swell of happiness, she promised her masters a trove of home food that three couldn't carry, let alone hide. Her fingers flew; she made a green Sinjin robe for herself, and another for Mady, humming as she fitted the material to her little shoulders.

"Gonna be a fine robe. Just wish your hair was longer."

Mady rubbed her snub nose. "Don't need it."

"Look like a picked chicken," Shalane grumbled through a mouthful of pins.

Corian was there to see them off, along with Arin and eleven masters. Each of the latter embraced Mady, each knelt to Shalane before their personal farewell hugs.

"You come back, goddess."

Arin whispered against her ear, "You come back, Lane."

"I will," she said, trying to quell the mouse-thought nibbling at her peace: that Arin hadn't wanted to come, hadn't even wanted to talk about it. Strange, now when they needed so much to share, how little of it they did.

Mady hopped into the power boat. Corian handed down their packs. Shalane stepped into the craft, followed by Bern, who would pilot them crossriver. As the boat pulled away, Shalane stood in the stern, both arms raised to her tiny circle. The air was sharp and sweet, and old sun never shone so warm. It was going to be real Sinjin.

On the dock, Corian tapped Arin's arm. "Still want to go to the Fist with me?"

Arin nodded. "More than ever."

"Did you tell the goddess?"

"No. It'll be a surprise."

The Wengen observed him shrewdly. "Why in hell didn't you go with them to Karli?"

Arin waited till the boat was a tiny chip in the middle of the river before turning away up the jetty and replying. "I couldn't, Cory."

"Why not?" Corian demanded, stumping along at his side. "Nothing here you're wild about."

"Nothing there, either." Arin dropped a long arm over Corian's shoulders. "In Karli, you have to believe a lot of things. Goddess, earth, sun, what happens in the circle. I've lost all that."

Corian nodded. He had his own Lishin.

"Still, Arin, might be good for you and Lane—up there on the Fist."

Mother and daughter stepped onto the first slow highway ramp, skipped lightly to faster lanes until they flew through the sunlit morning. Shalane felt freer with every breath. She sat down, loosed her hair from strip and pin, shook it out and let the wind thake it.

"Wheeee, mama!" Squinting against the warm breeze, Mady laughed excitedly. "You look like a flag!"

Shalane joined her daughter in laughter. She even felt like a flag, too long furled, glad to wave at last. Throwing back her head, she let the winds of summer burn her face. It felt like food after hunger, love after loneliness. Pulling Mady close, she sang.

Spitt arranged for Shalane and Mady to travel from Filsberg with a wagon train of trade goods. Two horses were waiting for them crossriver.

Shalane sized up the small quarter-horse mare she planned to let Mady ride. "This old woman's little and smart like you, hon. Won't have no trouble with her. But that one there..."

A small-headed, coal-black beast that dwarfed Mady's mount at the shoulder; nervous, skittish, rolling its eyes, suspicious even of its placid four-footed neighbor.

"That's a Suffec horse," Shalane said. "Been ten years since I sat one like her."

To Karli they went, far ahead of the wagons. Shalane pointed out trees and

birds to Mady with the pride of personal ownership. When the child grew chafed with riding, they dismounted and lazed along, leading the horses.

Shalane revelled in the green around them, doubly glad because ten years earlier they could not have traveled so carelessly through Karli Forest. Most of the danger was gone now, and the beauty might vary and fade, but always come back.

She chattered on, unaware that Mady's interest and spirits were drooping fast. "...and that's sugar maple, must be a farm close by. Grampa Garick brought 'em from north Wengen. When I was little, we tasted sugar maybe once a year. Look, see that young beech over there where the bark's torn away? Old whitetail been at it, they just love to nibble."

"Yes, mama," Mady repeated.

Once, Shalane moved off the trail to pick a double handful of a broadleaf plant with faint reddish streaks down the stems. "What all them Mrikans call dinner, we'll cook this up with it. Poke, Mady. Grows up in a bush taller'n you with poison berries. But this time of year it's young, you boil a mess of this with pork and no one ever ate better."

"Yes, mama."

She gave the horse time to find no fear in her own scent, then Shalane flowed into the saddle like a shadow. The mare shied suddenly and reared high, whinnying, Mady gasped. But Shalane gathered the reins tight, bringing the rebellious head up. Gradually, the mare subsided, movements less random, responding quicker to the rein, until Shalane brought her to a full halt.

Flushed with an excitement her daughter barely understood, Shalane said, "Now...let's ride to Karli!"

Turi moved the synth-oil lamp closer and opened the leather bag, spilling a few of the bright coins on the table. New money in gold, stamped with Garick's profile on one side; on the other there was a simple circle with tiny cups at the four compass points.

The coins were of varying sizes for different amounts: one, two, five, ten and twenty krets. Some older Karli looked fish-eyed at the gold and other innovations, but none of them criticized the better life that came with them. Hard money gave Karli muscle in trading. This year, it made up an imbalance with the Wengenis due to a bad year for Karli sheep. Soon, the gold would be indispensable.

Corian found the gold for Garick, tons of it in neat bars, hidden when the Jings came, useless and forgotten until he and Spitt broke the ancient code that guarded its locations. They could have gone another thousand years without it, Turi guessed, but others broke the code, too, and were using gold in the west.

A light tap at the half-closed door. Darin put in his shaggy head.

"Hey," he greeted her. "Hear Shalane's coming."

She nodded. "Tomorrow."

Darin came in and closed the door. A big man with bulky shoulders, he still trod the plank floor without a sound to sit down opposite Turi. He looked grim.

?

"Some of the masters picked up a weak lep," he replied.

"Who?"

"Constab, north near Wengen. They couldn't read much. It's Santee."

Turi protested. "They cleaned him out."

"All but Ben and a few others. They jumped a farm near the border." Darin dropped his head into his big brown hands. He and Turi had dealt with it for years, were heartily sick of it.

"How bad?"

"Stole some horses, slaughtered the stock."

"Karli farm?"

"Yes."

*And the folk?*

He opened his mind for the goddess to read.

*All?*

He nodded. Burned inside the farmhouse."

It was sickening, but Turi sensed something worse behind. "What is it, Darin?"

"The constab were close behind. They just missed Santee, but they caught one of

the others." He raised his eyes to Turi. "They're bringing him back."

Turi knew what it meant. She pinched her tired eyes. "That patrol's mostly Suffec. They never take prisoners."

"It's a Karli bringing him in, the one that caught him."

The god and goddess shared a glance of understanding. They sickened at the execution of cowan hunters. The few passed back by patrols were put to sleep and painlessly despatched, but ending any life was dreadful to coveners, and Darin and Turi despised the necessary.

The Karli rider who captured Santee's man might feel some compunction about killing, but more likely he also needed a rest. If you brought a criminal to Karli or Charzen, you could count on a night's sleep in a bed and three good meals. This particular patrol, Turi and Darin knew, had been riding before Belten, over seven weeks. That wouldn't bother a Suffec, but Karli and Shando liked to get home now and then.

Privately, Darin and Turi wished they could make an explicit order of summary execution. It happened, anyway, nine times out of ten, but to officially legislate it involved a precedent no Circle god wanted to set. So killing the cowan had to be their own dirty job.

Turi sighed, heavy with the knowledge. "When will they be in?"

"Maybe two days," Darin replied. He reached across to take her hands. "I can do it alone this time."

She lifted his hands and kissed them. "No, it's a misery for you, too. Together."

The meadows and fields Shalane once knew were dotted now with many more farms than she remembered. Beyond, the unchanged stockade still circled the master's hall, where she pledged at sixteen. She shaded her eyes. Past the stockade to the southeast, Shalane marked the wood where oak, beech and walnut trees, never touched by axe or saw, enclosed an ancient clearing, its circle trench worn deep from countless fire days, ages of Sammans, Beltens and Sinjins. There the ground was hard-packed from centuries of dancing feet, gray-white with



the ash of innumerable sacred fires. The earliest memory of Shalane's life, and its center.

She was home.

Something welled out of her chest, stung her eyes, squeezed her tight, exploded with joy. She yanked her mare about; at a flick of the reins, the animal leaped forward, plunged recklessly down the slope. Mady followed slowly.

A bowshot ahead, Shalane reined in at a small brook, dismounted and took off her clothes. When Mady caught up, she stripped her down to skin and shivering dignity and scrubbed both herself and the long-suffering little girl to pink freshness.

"Only one color for Sinjin, and that's green," said Shalane, slipping the new robe she'd made over Mady's head, smoothing and tugging it till it hung right.

She prepared herself with less urgency, her movements more controlled, as in a ritual. The green robe rustled down over Shalane's shoulders and breasts, hook-fastened tight at her waist, fuller as its slit skirts fell to her ankles.

Shalane donned a new white tabbard, belted it precisely with the knotted cord, and attached the white thammay. Then she swung up onto the mare and Mady passed her the antler crown and moon sigil.

Time for last-minute reminders. "Now, Mady, when you speak to a master, call 'em that. Kneel to Darin and Turi like I showed you; and just stand still when the masters kneel to me. We get kind of loose in City, but Karli'll 'spect you to have some manners."

"Yes, mama. But is it all right if I walk?"

"Walk?" Shalane wondered whether she'd heard right. "Walk into Karli?"

"Mama, I'm all sore behind and inside my legs. Please let me walk."

"Well, I 'spect not! No girl of mine's gonna walk into Karli like a sheep. Get up now, you don't hurt that much."

"Please, mama," Mady begged, but Shalane's robed arm shot out, pointing like fate to the quarterhorse.

"UP!"

No reprieve. Mady struggled painfully into the hated saddle, forlornly wishing she were home with Marian and her Daddy.

Long before they entered the stockade

gate, Shalane saw the changes ten years made in Karli. The new houses began as far as a mile from the masters' hall, each with three or four acres under plow. Familiar paths over the sheep-cropped hills were almost like streets now, and there was no more than a bowshot between houses. The old coven signs—sun, moon and earth—were still daubed over doorways, but rendered now in bright weatherproof paint, sold by Mrikans who learned how to make it from City.

No sheep ambled about the stockade yard, no longer did hogs root or hens cluck in the clean-swept space, but people by the dozen hurried about their business with energetic strides, scarcely nodding to the goddess as she and Mady rode by.

Awful lot of Mrikans, Shalane noticed. And don't folks know what's right any more? When she was a girl, visitors were a rare event, and nearly everybody turned out to meet them, but now some people gave her a courteous greeting, but most didn't. And meanwhile there were children, children, children everywhere squealing and tussling, skipping and running, darting in and out of Shalane's path, not even mannerly enough to bob their heads as they passed.

But she was glad there were so many children. Covenanters lost few at birth any longer, men like Corian and Ted Rashevsky changed all that. Though change made more change; more children needed more houses and more food. Twice as many sheep grazed the hills, half as much raw forest still girdled Karli, the new-bared land under plow, its timber disappearing into the hungry mouth of a new sawmill.

The old, weathered masters' hall, she noted gratefully, was the same. But there was a smaller building with a lettered sign over its entrance next to the hall. Shalane never expected to see a sign with writing in Karli, it seemed an intrusion.

"Mady, what's that damfool thing say?"

The child told her: UHIAN CONSTABULARY AND COMMERCIAL.

One thing at least would never change: the masters waiting on the steps of the hall in a grave arc around the tall figures of Darin and Turi.

Shalane reined in before the formal group and dismounted. Mady floundered clumsily out of the saddle to edge close to her mother as the eleven Karli masters came forward and knelt to Shalane's crown, then stood aside to let her pass.

Shalane mounted the steps, bending smoothly to the Karli crowns, Mady in awkward imitation. Then Shalane removed her own headdress and passed it to her daughter in the ancient protocol that recognized the god's and goddess' authority on their own covenant.

Darin gave her a ritual kiss. "Karli's own should come home for Sinjin," he said.

Shalane received another embrace from Turi, who said, "Goddess Earth is green again," and then the ceremony was done. The masters broke ranks, crowding in on the visitors with warm greetings.

One master had a chain of wildflowers woven into a crown for Mady. She blushed and stammered her thanks.

Darin and Turi stood a little aside while Shalane engulfed old friends in her arms.

"Remember Jenna?" Turi murmured to her husband. "Bet this Mady grows as big. Six foot before she's sixteen, just wait."

"Easy," Darin nodded. "She's got the bones."

The god and goddess of Karli were a little younger than Arin and Shalane, coming to mastership in the middle of war, to the crowns in the wake of revolutionary change. Big, blonde Darin had a body scarred with merk arrows and seared by the thrower-weapons Jeremiah used at Dannyline. Freckled, energetic, homely Turi had a luxury of fine brown hair that fell behind to her hips, but the hairline under her crown was deeply furrowed where a merk cut her in the battle of Karli Forest.

From the beginning, their leadership was more political than religious. They dealt in hard money and harder choices—like having to kill cowans like Santee's man about to be brought into Karli. The two could read and write, and they used those gifts to conduct business their predecessors Hoban and Tilda never dreamed of. But Darin and Turi knew that the covens were no longer an island; like it or not, they

were part of a larger world waking from a long slumber.

"Try to hold back time, it'll roll right over you," Turi whispered to Darin. She was quoting Corian...cocky, arrogant Corian who came back from his gold search a skeleton, regaining health but never quite his ignorant boy's superiority. He drank less, too, and much more carefully. And never alone. Passionate, lonely, complex Corian; not quite cowan, not quite Circle, but knowing Circle mind better than any outsider Turi could name.

*He's Shalane's friend, Darin thought. He could help her.*

Turi squeezed his hand and twisted her own mouth at the notion, hoping Shalane hadn't read Darin by accident. But it was true. The woman certainly needed help, you could read pain all over her.

"It's all her own fault," Turi muttered.

Partly, anyway. Ten years in City with one of the best men of their time, with a daughter so smart and lep-strong the child was scary, almost—and yet the damfool wouldn't even learn to read. Not couldn't: *wouldn't*. Shalane once asserted it with a pride that embarrassed Turi to admit she could. But you almost had to be able to read nowadays, how else could you deal with Garick and so many distant peoples? It was actually faster to write a few pages—and the hell with the spelling—than to gather in masters and spend time and energy on a lep that other masters might or might not read.

Poor Shalane, Turi sighed, sharing the feeling with Darin. She'd be happy as old fox chasing rabbits in a coven that never heard of City or Garick, breaking horses and birthing children. *Born too late.*

Shalane spotted the sandy-haired, bearded man coming from the constab house. She hurried through the crowd toward him, dragging Mady along.

"Moss!"

He turned and his face lit with pleasure. Shalane threw her arms around her father, face buried in his white-streaked beard.

"Oh, dad," Shalane exclaimed, "lemme hug you!" She laughed, but with moist eyes. "Mady, this is your grampa. Last time you were too little to remember, but here he is!"

Moss picked up Mady as easily as a flower, kissing her, holding her without strain. Fifty-eight, content with a new wife, he seemed to his daughter as young and strong as ever.

*Taking Betta home to live was a good idea, Shalane thought. With her mother Maysa buried at Dannyline, Moss spent two disconsolate years rattling around, lonely, in their big house. And he's not the sort to live alone like Ar—* Shalane's breath caught. Now why did she almost think that?

"This is my girl?" Moss chuckled, tickling Mady's chin with his beard. "Hey, Mady, y'all come home. Betta's waiting and there's some kind of supper."

"Fresh corn?" Shalane asked, tempted.

"Early corn, a little. But just about anything else, Lane. Come on."

"Lookit you," Shalane whistled. "Moss, when'd you start wearing Lorcloth?"

Her father preened a bit. The shirt and pants were new and fit well. "Since it got so cheap and you can buy it over there in the commercial-house. Heck, old skins too hot for Sinjin, anyway."

Shalane turned slowly about the busy stockade court. "It's all so different, dad. Where'd all these folks come from?"

"All over. Wengen, Shando, some Mrikans."

Her mouth turned down. "Cowans."

Moss admitted there'd been many changes. "It dizzies me, too, sometimes, Lane, but we never lived so good."

She bridled. "We did all right before!"

"Maybe," Moss shrugged. "Ready to come home, Lane?"

"Not...not just yet."

Her father studied her, worried, but he understood. "Want me to take Mady on ahead?"

"Thanks," she nodded. "I'll be along soon. Just want to look some."

As Moss set her down, Mady asked in a small voice, "Grampa, may we walk? Please?"

"Sure," he smiled, giving her his big hand. "Maybe we'll do some berry-picking 'long the way, but don't let's get that pretty new robe stained. Likely you'll be the best-looking little girl at the fire...but who the

hell cut your hair?"

Long after supper, Turi sat hunched over the cleared wooden table working on the daily records. Darin entered the room, bent down and kissed her cheek.

"Hey," he greeted, "Shalane's come."

Turi sighed and scooped the coins back into the bag, tying it. She jostled the papers into a neat pile. "Some good news for her," she said to her husband. "Rider from Filsberg brought Shalane a letter."

"From Arin?"

She nodded. "Ought to cheer her some."

Darin straightened his long body. "Well, you see her then. I'll get the kids to bed."

He ushered in their guest and left. Turi lifted an eyebrow when she saw Shalane. Her own light shirt and pants were almost too much for the humid summer evening, but Shalane was in full robe and wool tabard. It made no sense. As a young master, Shalane used to go naked most of the time when it was warm, and when she did dress, her clothes looked like somebody threw them at her.

Turi motioned her to a chair. "Sit down, Lane."

But she hovered diffidently before her. "Favor, goddess."

"Since you helped teach me my mastership, can't you call me Turi? What can I do?"

"At Sinjin tomorrow. I'd like to be in the circle."

"Of course." Hardly a favor, Turi thought. It was the usual courtesy to let a visiting master share a ceremony if they so desired. "Well, how do you like being home, Lane?"

Shalane's eyes roved the room, not resting on anything. Turi supposed she remembered it the way it was when Tilda was goddess, when the place was dark and always smelled musty, but now it was bright-painted and decorated with fresh flowers.

"It's good to be back," Shalane said without much conviction.

"I guess Moss' house changed some."

Shalane shrugged. "Oh, he and Betta just love Mady. Don't guess she ever ate so much at one sitting."

"Food all right for her?" Turi wondered. "She looks real City to me."

"She's not." The correction was a little too firm. "Just no chance to learn anything else."

Turi appraised her shrewdly, but held her tongue. Rising, she took a small packet off a nearby shelf. "This letter just came for you, Lane. Must be from Arin."

Shalane glowed like a lamp suddenly lit in a dark room. "Real? Oh, my! Let me see." Turi gave it to her, and Shalane turned the envelope over in her hands. "First time in my life someone ever sent me writing..."

The flood of emotion leaking from Shalane almost made Turi wince, but she forced herself to stay open, sharing. With painful certainty, Turi read the other's sorrow, that compounded sense of love and loss which Arin signified.

Shalane shyly passed the letter back. "Please tell me what he says."

"But this is family," Turi demurred. "Why not ask Mady to read it to you?"

"Because it's my letter. I'll tell her what's in it if I want. Go on."

The sharpness surprised Turi, but again she kept her opinions to herself. She opened the letter and read it aloud.

*Lane,  
I hope Mady won't have trouble reading this to you, I'm trying to print clearly. Hope you're both having a good time together. Corian wants you and me to help him with the Fleetters on the Fist. I think we should. We don't get much time alone, Lane, and I miss you. You'll love it, don't even have to sleep in a house if you don't want, and Cory is eager to show you the ocean, so you can see how big it is, you never believed me when I told you. Get Mady home after Sinjin and fast-ramp to north med center. We'll meet you there, and we can go out by the Whitestone passage. Punkin, I miss you and your mama, with you both,  
ARIN*

"You know," Turi said, after she'd repeated the letter to Shalane twice, "that would be some kind of summer up there. You'd like it, Lane. Real old-time folks."

She folded the letter carefully and placed it in front of her guest.

Shalane said nothing. Her head was bent over the letter, fingers spread above its surface to touch what he'd touched.

Turi patted her shoulder. "Will you go?"

Shalane smiled so broadly that her chipmunk teeth stuck out and she looked nineteen again. "Sure as frost I will, Turi! Arin and me, we'll show them Fleetters how it's done."

Because Shalane felt happy for the first time in she couldn't remember how long, she suddenly sensed that the Karli goddess was not. The woman held some private anguish. With a sure, gentle power, Shalane probed.

*Turi, what? Share.*

Reluctantly, Turi leaped the news of the farm sacked by Sahtee, of the murders, of the prisoner being brought in and what must be done with him. "Me and Darin, we hate it. Damn it, Lane, it just never ends."

"Always you and Darin alone? Why not the masters?"

Turi didn't answer right away, thinking out her reasons. "Lane, do you ever talk to Mady about the war?"

*"No. Never."*

Turi nodded. "Course not, you keep that locked up where it belongs. Darin and I do the same. We spare them that."

Shalane understood, but she shrugged. "Shit, it's just a cowan."

Turi stiffened. "And we just have a notion that life is sacred. Or had it once. Seems to've got lost."

*"Yes. It's not all that did."*

Turi rose and stretched to ease her tired back. "Well, tomorrow I'll see you're in the circle at the fire. Good night, goddess."

Mady woke again, terrified. If she could only sleep, maybe tomorrow might not be so bad, but she kept having upsetting dreams, and she didn't think it was the rich food, though Betta's fried possum and poke make her burp for an hour after dinner, and she had to get up twice during the night, but at least grampa Moss had a bathroom.

In her nightmares, something prowled

not far away and was ready to leap at her, and only music or words, words, words staved it off, set up a barrier. And so the syllables pattered on and there were Bach fugues like a fortress of notes barricading her against the unseen thing that crept, that lurked in the dark.

Mady missed her father, but now she especially wanted Marian because, always, at home, when Mady had a bad dream, Marian would calmly and patiently explain what it meant, discussing each dream-image till Mady saw them as the harmless symbols they were.

The child was tormented by a sense of guilty shame. Of course she loved her mother, and grampa Moss and Betta couldn't do enough for her, but all she wanted was to go home. Here in Karl, for the first time in her young life, Mady was frightened of sleep.

And then it was Sinjin.

The fire both excited and scared Mady, she couldn't handle it all at once, though she believed she knew what the holiday meant. Her mother had said it over and over: that Sinjin was Goddess Earth at her most beautiful, the sun at his closest and most powerful. (But why give thanks for something that happened every year, did coveners really worry it might not?)

At the fire, Turi would be the symbol of the earth, she'd be poised by the piled fruits of their crop and, in her dance, would become earth in its three phases: young girl in spring waiting to be kissed by the sun; midsummer wife heavy with life inside her; old woman in autumn and winter, her promise kept, waiting to be born again in the eternal year-wheel

...which represents a stage in religious ideation older than monotheistic or personal god/man relationship; odd echoes occur in Nietzschean "eternal recurrence." Q.V., + vide. 877(8)-0294/recurrence." Q.V., + vide. 877(8)-0294/270)...

Fire days in the City were clean and neat, indoors in bad weather, sometimes with Diane taking notes, but in Karl it was something wild burst out of a cage and so

intense that the lep-sharing hurt, and mama always was beautiful, but when she dropped her robe to go into the circle naked, she changed, grew, shone with terrible energy.

With Darin as the odd thirteenth, the sun, each of the six couples in the circle danced to the music chanted by the people outside. Turi danced as if she had no bones. Must be strong to move like that, Mady reflected, strong as mama and that was saying a good deal because on the trip from Filsberg, Shalane staymagicked a rabbit for supper, her mind a tight fist clamped around its tiny will, but the animal never suffered—one quick chop across its neck, and only fur held the long-eared head to the body.

*How mama can dance!* The sight of her and the other masters was both beautiful and a torment. Their intensity built with the throbbing chant till, seduced by the pulsing surge and ebb, Mady could not resist opening her locked mind to share.

She reeled and almost fell. Mady, panic-struck, shut down again quickly. Dark, sweet, bitter and brilliant. Simultaneously joyful and luring and threatening. A deluge of emotion mysteriously connected with the glistening forms of the male masters in the circle. Mady knew how and why their bodies differed from hers, but now they were subtly unlike the way she'd studied them, and she couldn't understand why the change should be so scary.

Yet she was tempted to open her mind a second time, just a little, but it she did the prowling presence might jump inside. Mady wanted to run away and yearned to stay.

She tried to divert her attention by focusing solely on the singing. She'd never heard it from so many throats before. It was a very old kind of music, related to pre-Jing varieties she'd listened to on Corian's tapes, except his most intricate recordings paled beside coven rhythms which went in four tempi at once and still managed to come out together.

Once, Mady tried to tell her mother about the music.

"Mama, that's seven-four."

"Hell, that's just Loomin-song."

"But Cory says the time works out to seven-four. And Belten music is real hard, it's eleven-four at the beginning and—you know the part, mama, where you come in 'dum-dum-da-dum'?—that's three-four over four-four—"

"Will you stop talking at me, baby?"

"Well, I heard it on Cory's tape and he said—"

"Cory don't know everything, and you, bitty girl, don't know nothing!"

Oh, mama.

*...dance in primitive culture is ecstatic, it effects the release from self into group consciousness, and may actually merge into the hypnotic...*

But Corian also says you have to be there, that's all, the numbers don't mean much, you can beat out the time, but when you hear it and see the dancing and how your mother whirls in the firelight, body gleaming with perspiration, all you can do is swallow and wonder.

The voices now sang only a few beats in each measure. Shalane danced the rest and it had to come out just right, too; a master who lost the beat in implied time must be out of tune with Goddess Earth who never lost or wasted anything.

Studying her mother, Mady decided she just wasn't ready to attempt to imitate such power, she could not move anywhere near so well, and even though she still wanted to share, she had a greater need to run from all of it. The mounting fear was not unmixed with sweet excitement, but the sharing was too frightening, she couldn't take so much of it at once, her feelings were overloaded with emotions but dimly comprehended—smells of anger, love, fright, each possessing its own special scent that played havoc with her mind.

*He smells bad, daddy.*

*No, he's just scared. If you ever got very frightened, you'd smell it on yourself.*

Like one time in the park when she almost fell off the big rock. There was a sick-hollow sensation in her stomach and then the fear-smell came.

But the odor of the masters in the circle was new, a raw, pungent tang like ammonia

and pepper. It smothered all other scents.

At last the rite ended. A rush of the younger coveners filling the cleared space to dance. Eager-shy, hitting and tugging each other, kicking like colts, clumsy as rag dolls after the smooth control of the masters, they lost and found the rhythm and lost it again, but it didn't matter. They touched one another more than the adults, grasping and petting, tickling and pulling with a shy but fierce need that Mady didn't like. Yet the laughter of the watching adults was warm and happy as they remembered this poignant awkwardness.

The young couples didn't dance long. Two by two, they dropped out of the circle and disappeared into the woods, nervous, jerky laughter trailing after them like bird-cries.

Consumed with curiosity, Mady considered following them, but she put the thought aside, she didn't know why; after all, she'd seen enough bio-function tapes and knew it was like her mother and father in the circle at home, though that was just a symbol. The penis entered the woman, and a baby might grow, but it was all foggy and disconnected and a little silly, too. Certainly not of any concern to her, but the tapes could not evoke what she now smelled and sensed till it ached.

Mady squirmed through the milling crowd of coveners until she found her mother. Still naked, leaning against the feast-laden table, her green robe draped over her sweaty neck, drinking a cup of sida.

"Mama, you never drink!"

Shalane took her daughter's hand. "Honey, tonight I do. You just bet tonight I do."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"Drinking hurts the body."

"Who says?" Shalane waved away the question. "Never mind, you can just bet I know."

Mady withdrew her hand. "Mama, I want to go home."

"Mady!" Shalane's eyes widened. "Oh, baby, oh, no! This is why we came, what I



wanted you to see. Why don't you dance?"

"I don't know how."

"Oh, that don't matter," Shalane scoffed, reaching out to grasp the hem of her daughter's robe. "Come on, lemme help you off with this and—"

"Mama!" The child skipped back, grabbing her clothes tightly about her. "Don't!"

"Looklook, see? There's a bitty boy like you, punkin. Bet you could dance him blue."

"I don't want to dance, mama, I want to go home!"

Her mother glared at her, then emptied her cup and set it on the table. She gathered her daughter close. Mady smelled the pungent odor she couldn't name. It made her stiffen, her instincts roused like raised hairs.

"First night I was with Arin, Mady, we ran all the way home from Samman fire 'cause we couldn't wait to be together." Shalane paused, brooding. Mady felt the change in her mother like sunlight suddenly shrouded by a stormcloud. "Arin had to be so goddam smarty-dumb like Garick and change everything."

"Daddy's not stupid!" Mady was outraged. "He's intelligent, Marian says so."

At mention of Marian's name, Shalane pulled away. She reached for the jug and refilled her cup. "If your daddy was so smart, he'd be here with us." She took another long pull of sida.

Mady swallowed, aware that she was daring much. "Daddy says Sinjin's old-fashioned."

The cup slammed on the table. Liquid slopped over the brim. "Let me tell you something, bitty girl, some things are better the old way, some things should never change." She grasped her daughter's wrist. "Come on now, you're going in the circle."

"No!" Paralyzed, Mady dug in her heels. Shalane tried to lift her, but the child was dead weight. "Mama, no!"

A few heads turned toward them. Angry and embarrassed, Shalane lowered her voice to a tense whisper. "What's the matter with you?"

"I don't want to, mama," Mady whined.

"How you gonna learn how things are?

Come on!"

"I already learned!"

"Learned what?"

"About sex! Don't pull me, please, mama, don't pull me..."

Shalane loosed her hold, but did not let go completely. Suddenly struck with sympathy for her daughter, she thought she finally understood what frightened her.

"Oh, baby, nothing'll happen, you're too young. Just this is so you'll be ready when you're older."

"But I already know what happens then," Mady objected, writhing to get free. "Marian—"

Shalane went white at the repetition of the hated name. "Marian? What's she know about men? She give you talk-boxes to listen to, newsreel to watch? When you're with a man, Mady, you feel it, and that's one thing that old bitch can't do, she ain't had a man since they built Karli."

"Mama, you're hurting my wrist. Let go!"

"If I do, will you go into the circle?"

"NO!"

Shalane released her daughter, but it was too late. The scream shattered the festivities. Voices hushed, people stared, and even Shalane couldn't catch a trace of lep. Then everyone tried to be polite and not pay attention to the goddess and her livid trembling child. The revelers took up Sinjin again, but just a little too loud at first.

Shalane threw her robe on the table. "All right, Mady, you go home if you want, you're smart enough to find it. Go away, I'm sick of looking at you." She strode off toward the circle.

Her mother's anger sickened Mady. She clenched her fists and teeth to keep control of her emotions. For a moment she stood alone, feeling abandoned, watching her mother seek a partner. Darin stepped into the circle and invited Shalane to dance.

Mady miserably wormed her way through knots of people, left the firelight and started down the path to her grandfather's house, choking back tears.

Shalane almost never drank. It did nothing for her and made her feel rotten afterwards. But tonight, an urge pulled at

her soul, impelling her to another yet another cup of sida, yes more now hurry and maybe she'd explode with yearning so she danced furiously with Darin and other men without really wanting to go out on the hill with them. Vaguely, she hoped to find Jay in the crowd, but he wasn't there.

Finally, she gave it up, there was no joy for her this Sinjin. With the consuming ache still in her breast, Shalane stepped heavily from the circle and found her robe. Her father and Betta were still at the fire, but she decided to walk home to Moss' house.

As she moved away from the firelit grove, she affixed the robe about her shoulders because the night air was cool. her feet felt like they had iron chains wrapped around them, and there was a tight knot in her stomach, but as she walked through the quiet forest, the bracing night air chased off some of her sida-dizziness and her head didn't throb so much. The silence all around calmed her, but she was in no hurry to get home and maybe face Mady again, so she picked a roundabout path that brought Shalane close to masters hall.

There she dawdled, thinking about the letter Arin sent her. Remembering it, she started to feel a little bad for the way she'd talked in front of Mady. The journey to the Fist was going to be real good, she and Arin would be with each other, they'd start sharing again, and this time she would not allow anything to come between them and change it. The sweetness of the resolution eased the dull sorrow in her chest.

Just then, she heard the sound of approaching horses, two riders coming on fast. Shalane stepped into the stockade clearing, curious to find out who was on the roads Sinjin night instead of at the fire. Then she sourly recalled that Karli nowadays was crawling with cowans. *Probably some fat-ass Mrikans.*

Two men rode into the open space and reined in alongside the squat building next to the hall, the one whose sign read UHIAN CONSTABULARY AND COMMERCIAL. The first to dismount was a tall, lean constab whom she readily identified as deepwoods, probably Karli. The other rider was fat, soaked in sweat, and tightly bound with ropes.

Figuring who the prisoner must be,

Shalane turned away and started walking again. The cowan's fear-smell disgusted her.

Her father's house was dark. Shalane opened the door to the room she shared with Mady—her own old room—and peered into the gloom.

"Mady?"

Silence.

Feeling for a box of City matches, she lit the synth-oil lamp. Its light spread across the room.

Shalane's breath caught.

Mady lay across the bed, shoulders heaving convulsively, though she made no noise as she sobbed. The child was dirty, and her arms and legs were covered with cuts and scratches.

"Baby. . . what happened?"

Mady knew her way to grampa's well enough. The houses along the path shimmered silvery in the moonlight, and the sap-smell of their new-cut planks mixed with the heady perfume of summer night. It was something like the park at home, rich with flowers and grass and the acrid reek of bird droppings and damp earth, only now it was overpowering, out of control. She needed to detach part of herself from it, pull away from the profusion of sensory stimuli.

Her path now led through a murky patch of woods. She had no fear of the dark, never did, but Mady was sharply aware of furtive movement and sounds all around. Off to her left, the high, light yapping of a fox; closer, in answer, the same kind of bark, but in a boy's poor imitation, ending in an exaggerated howl, followed by the thin, tinkly laughter of a girl.

The night was heavy with stealthy sounds: whispers and giggles; footsteps sliding stealthily through the trees; sibilant murmurs and agitated thrashing in the leaves and underbrush, and somewhere to her right a high voice uttered a soft gasp that suddenly rose to a smothered cry.

Over it, Mady's sensitive nose detected the same scent which both drew her to and drove her away from the dancers' circle, that ammonia-and-pepper thing which assaulted her nostrils like skunk musk.

She reached the edge of the woods and stepped out into a moon-washed meadow. A slight rustle of movement to one side caught her attention; she turned that way, and froze.

On a dark square of blanket, two gangly bodies squirmed and tossed, locked together. Though in the shadow of the trees, the light was bright enough so their whiteness stood out sharply.

Mady watched their last final twitchings in fascination, fear and shame. Sighing deeply, the boy rolled off the girl, reached for a jug stolen from the feast tables, tilted it to his mouth. It sloshed faintly.

Lorn's sharp forest senses, returning from satisfaction, picked her up like a clean, cool breeze threading through springtime grass. He waved to her.

"Hey," he hiccuped, "who you? What y'all doing out, little girl?"

His companion, scarcely fourteen herself, shifted on the blanket and smiled at the trembling child in the green robe. "Hell, Lorn," the blonde tittered, "she just a baby, too little."

"Not on Sinjin night," the boy laughed, rolling indolently onto his back. "C'mere, baby."

Mady gulped, heart pounding as she stared at the dark nipples of the leggy girl's half-budded breasts and the boy's still-moist, semi-stiff penis. "I'm going home."

"Aww, don't go yet," Lorn drawled. "Just might give you a drink."

"Don't want any."

The lithe blonde suddenly jumped up and took Mady's arm gently but firmly. She pulled the reluctant child down on the blanket, running her fingers through Mady's cropped hair.

Breathing rapidly, Mady glanced from one to the other. She wanted to wrest free and run, but her legs were like rubber.

"I know who this is," he said. "Bitty City gal."

"Sure as frost! She come with the goddess."

"Leave me alone," Mady insisted, wriggling to release herself from the girl's grip. "I have to go."

"Baby wants to go home, Lorn."

"Your ma won't mind," he laughed easily, "she's back dancing. C'mon, baby, let's play."

And they did; Mady was their rag doll, they ruffled her short hair and flopped her this way and that, they rolled her over and hiked her robe so they could pat and tease and lightly stroke and slap her bare bottom; she begged them to stop, but they wouldn't. Neither had any thought to hurt Mady, there was no malice or bullying in them, but each still was euphoric with the thrill of their first time, and their intoxication spilled over into a kind of rough, sensual affection which Mady didn't understand and couldn't tolerate.

"Stop, please stop!" The terror worsened as Lorn got up on top of her. The girl held Mady while Lorn pretended to love her with a flurry of grunts and moans, and he took care not to put his weight on the child, but the sense of nightmare grew as Mady shrilly protested, "You stop, you stop, mama says I'm too little!"

"It's Sinjin, baby girl. Ain't gonna hurt you."

But Mady didn't know that at all. It was just play to Lorn, mainly to amuse his girlfriend, but the child was frightened and outraged and City people don't touch so. Marian accorded her respect and distance from the very first, and even mamadad playing housebuilding in bed never poked around her private parts with stinky fingers, and the boy's half-erect penis pressed its sticky tip between her legs and he rubbed it back and forth till her loathing and fear and rage swelled and she shrieked and struck him with her fists and mind.

"You too rough, Lorn, she's scared," the girl said, but he was already rolling away, head clutched in his hands where Mady's angry lep slashed him with the pain of a sudden sharp headache. He tried to tell her he didn't mean to hurt her, but now Mady couldn't stop herself as she screamed and lunged at him, clawing at his face.

Lorn stumbled to his feet and tried to keep the kicking, biting savage at arm's length. "Baby, baby," he crooned, "I didn't

mean nothing bad, just it's Sinjin."

The blonde put her arm around Mady's shoulders to comfort her, but twisting free, she staggered off a few steps, choking, mouth dry, throat raw.

Clutching her robe to yank it down over her legs, Mady was horrified to discover her own body had shamed her. *Mama's pretty robe!* Her fists bunched and knotted, and the boy worried she was about to attack him again, but then deep embarrassment overcame Mady and she ran away, her sobs trailing behind like torn flesh.

"Honest, he didn't mean it, baby!" the girl called, concerned for the child and also scared for herself and Lorn because, after all, the City girl was the daughter of an important goddess. "He was just fooling—real!"

Mady hardly heard her. Ragged breath tearing her lungs, she churned her legs fast till she saw a copse and dashed into it to escape the naked moonlight. She did not slacken pace amid the concealing trees though twigs whipped and cut her arms and brambles scratched her legs.

She emerged near her grandfather's house. Crumpling to her knees, Mady vomited in the long grass.

"Baby...what happened?"

Sullen silence.

Shalane felt for Mady's mind, but she locked it tight behind her will—though not before her mother read the revulsion and resentment.

"Mady!" Dropping across the bed, she took her in her arms. Mady's breathing was spasmodic and her cheeks were damp with tears. *Open-up, let me share.*

"N-no, mama."

"Come on, you need help."

"No. I just want to go home."

Her mother tried to soothe her. "But this is your home, baby."

"It is not. I hate it here." Mady shook off her mother and flung herself face down on the bed.

Feeling numb and useless, Shalane hovered close, smoothing her daughter's short, tangled hair, trying to caress her violently trembling body to calm it. "Tell mama, honey, please tell mama, please."

Sniffing, voice jerky with greater

emotion than she had sufficient words to tell it with, Mady reluctantly attempted to explain. "I...I was c-coming home through the woods, mama, and ...and there was this...this boy and girl and they...p-pulled me down on a blanket..."

The bald facts could not communicate Mady's complex shame and anger, but Shalane thought she understood. This sort of thing happened often at Sinjin, she'd gone through it herself, sometimes it was a little rough but only just fooling, she couldn't imagine the boy actually hurting Mady. Abruptly, Shalane rolled her child over and yanked the dirtied, rumpled robe above her hips.

"Don't mamal!"

"Hush, baby, I got to look." She pulled her daughter's thighs apart and spread the inner lips, unaware she was making Mady feel newly violated.

"I told him...to st-stop, mama...but he wou-wouldn't..."

"It's all right," Shalane said, relieved. Mady was red from the saddle-chafing, but otherwise hadn't been touched. She cuddled the child close, Mady's damp weepy face against her own. She wished her daughter would let herself open up so she could help. Sure, once she got a bit roughed up, too, at Sinjin, and maybe it made her a little mad, but not hysterical like Mady. Hell, that was how to learn loving, you were ready for it when it really came. If only Mady would share, then Shalane could pass the gift down that her own mama Maysa once shared with her, and then Mady would understand that what took place with the boy and the girl on the blanket was just part of being alive.

She tried to say it in words that stammered and halted, but if all got mixed up with how it never hurt because what with her breaking horses and her own self-curious tickling experiments, Shalane didn't have anything left for a boy to force, and her first time on the hill was with a boy so excited and clumsy that he finished before he was half in her, but it was sort of fun trying and it sure wasn't scary and children always messed around together like that.

Her mother rambled on. Mady's anger cooled and condensed into a small, tight

knot in her chest. When Shalane faltered to a stop, Mady stared at her and spoke as if from a great distance. "No, mama, most of that's irrelevant, there's more than just the sex."

"What then? Lep, Mady. You know I'm not any good at dumb words."

"No." The cold syllable dropped like a stone. "I want to go home, mama."

Her unexpected self-possession disturbed Shalane. She groped at her daughter's mind, but Mady kept it resolutely shut.

"Mama, I said I want to go home."

"In a few days."

"Now! I want my daddy. I hate Karli."

Shalane gasped. "Well, I never thought a girl of mine—"

"Mama," Mady interrupted, "I want to go back to school."

"To Marian?"

"Yes."

"Damn that woman, what's she turned you into?"

Mady glared at her but said nothing.

"Baby, if you'll only just share with me, I promise it'll make everything all right."

She realized her mother meant it, but Mady couldn't. Before she opened her feelings to others again, she wanted first to know them herself. They were too frightening: the lack of sleep, the prowling nightmare, the total assault on her senses of sight and smell and sound, and the ultimate outrage to her body, her self. She distrusted the engulfing coven sharing that wrought havoc with her mind like an idiot turned loose with red paint in a white room, it was too much power because she felt inadequate to control or channel the flow, maybe she had to be older.

"Baby," Shalane pleaded, "you're hurting, I know. Tell mama, I want to make it all better, please let me."

Part of Mady really wanted to respond to the love and concern, but Shalane only spoke Uhian and that wasn't subtle enough, and even English had its limitations, which left only one way the child could express herself without lep. Half out of longing and need for her mother and half out of spite, she decided to try.

When Shalane saw her daughter's small hands begin to move, anger and frustration welled up within her. "I asked you once not to do that," she warned.

But Mady's fingers flew, snapping and curling and shaping, each movement cluster representing ideas ten times faster and more complicated than she could ever manage orally.

"Stop it!" Shalane snapped. "Don't do that to me. I can't understand that fool shortmind, Mady, you know that."

"That's not my fault, mama."

"What you doing, anyhow?"

"You asked me to tell, so I am, the best way I can."

"Not like that," Shalane spat. "Tell. Or lep."

"But words are *insufficient*, mama," Mady taunted, deliberately employing an unfamiliar English term.

"Huh?"

"That means words aren't enough, mama. Neither's lep."

"All right. Then share."

"No!"

Shalane shook her fiercely. "Goddam you, Mady, you're a Karli, so you share."

"I am not a Karli!" Mady twisted away.

"What, you think 'cause your daddy comes from Charzen, that makes you a Shando?"

"No, mama," the child screamed. "I'm CITY!"

The blood rushed from Shalane's face. She felt suddenly dizzy, thought she might faint. But she answered Mady, each word pronounced with extreme precision.

"Bitty girl...you...sure...as...hell...ain't."

Surging to her feet, little fists clenched, eyes blazing, Mady bellowed, "City, mama, CityCityCity!" She hit out at her mother's reaching arms. It was too late now, Mady's fury pushed beyond love or kindness or even caution as the hurtful words spilled from her contemptuously curled lips. "You leave me alone, mama, I can't talk to you, nobody can 'cause you don't know anything and you don't want to know anything and you don't even want anyone else ever to know anything! You won't learn you can't even read like Turi..."

Tears started in Shalane's eyes. No,

baby, don't, you're all I've got left, don't do this—

"You're IGNORANT, mama!" Mady was out of control, she couldn't stop. "And keep away from my mind, I hate that! You—"

"Mady, stop," Shalane's hands twitched spasmodically. "—don't know how I feel, don't care how I feel!"

"Mady, stop!"

"You're just as bad as that boy. First thing you do, you roll me over and grab and look up my legs without asking. How can I share, you don't even know I don't want to be touched, not like that? You don't know anything about me, mama..."

"Mady, stop!"

"...and you don't even know what daddy thinks any more!"

"SHUT UP!"

Shalane's hand shot out when she shrieked, striking her daughter so hard she fell. Howling with pain, Mady scrambled to her feet, hands against her nose, blood trickling through her fingers.

Shalane was instantly horrified. She'd never struck her little girl since she came out of her body. "Oh, baby, oh... I'm sorry! Let me fix it."

But Moss and Betta came in from outside and his gruff voice sounded from the kitchen. "Hey, what the hell's the matter in there?"

Mady ran out of the room, bawling. She flew into her grandfather's comforting arms.

Shalane stared at her hand as if it belonged to somebody else.

Turning down the lamp, she closed the door and sat on her old bed in the dark, her mouth buried in the sleeve of her Sinjin green robe so Mady and Moss and Betta wouldn't hear her crying.

The morning after Sinjin, the stockade court was quiet and empty. Darin and Turi stood in front of the masters' hall, grave and still, watching Shalane and Mady walk their horses through the gate. Moss was behind them leading a pack horse.

In the middle of the calm, sunny morning, the silence was oddly tense. There was something heavy in the air, a hovering, lowering gloom.

Shalane noticed it at once. She thought it was just her own mood, but Mady's small bandaged face tilted up suddenly, and she knew the child read it, too.

"Stay with grampa," Shalane ordered curtly. "I'll say goodbye for both of us." No need for Turi to read more than she already was picking up.

Shalane approached the god and goddess, bowed to their crowns and sensed the tautness in both even as they tried to mask it.

"Be careful on the road to Filsberg," Darin advised. "It's clear, but the patrol in that sector's way north now, probably trying to catch up with Santee. Watch yourself, you never know."

"Moss will ride a spell with us," Shalane said shortly.

"You feel bad, Lane?" Turi asked solicitously.

"Bad as you. You two read like sore teeth. What's the matter?"

They lepped, a painful intertwining of reluctant thoughts. *The cowan's inside. It's today.*

"We wanted to say goodbye first," said Darin, trying hard to smile. "Ride with the sun, goddess."

"And be born again to the Karli." Turi kissed Shalane, then she and Darin re-entered the hall.

Shalane started back across the court. Tension festered in the air like summer heat just before the explosion of a rainstorm. She halted, stroked her mare's neck, looked back toward the masters' hall.

Inside, Gosset sat motionless with the constab rider standing over him. He still didn't know what they had in store. Here, at least, he was allowed to sit in a comfortable chair, and the woman even gave him a mug of hot tea before she and her tall mate went outside.

Gosset was clammy with fright when they first led him into the large room. Ben said they weren't really human, but somehow he felt less afraid now, even relaxed, maybe because they asked him to sit down to tea like neighbors. But he still didn't hope much, either.

The tea was good, though. His shaking stopped, he wasn't piss-scared any more.



And then the man and woman returned. The look in their eyes seemed far away, like they were watching him from the moon.

The man broke the silence. "How do you feel?"

"Kinda tired." Gosset's mouth was dry despite the pungent tea. "What happens to me?"

No answer, just that distant moon-look.

"Well, what? I ain't afraid of you, what you gonna do...kill me?"

He couldn't understand these people, they just turned away like he hurt their feelings.

"Yes," the woman said finally. "When you're asleep. There's no pain."

Gosset tried to laugh, but it came out flat and false. "You think I'll just lay down and go to sleep for you?"

"Yes." Darin stated it like an accomplished fact. "You're on the way now."

Shit! Gosset swore to himself. *The tea!* That's why he was so drowsy.

"Hell I will!" Gosset lumbered to his feet, shaking off the restraining hand of the constab rider behind him. It was an effort, but the fat man intended to fight it all the way, they wouldn't finish him so easy, not for something he didn't do.

"Look," he protested, "wasn't me or Ritt killed those folks. Ben did it, you know how crazy Santee is. I tried to stop him, I said, Ben, leave 'em be, we got the horses, let's—"

But his legs would no longer hold his great weight. Gosset floundered into the chair, fought to stand again, but a ton of softness pressed him down.

For a moment he wheezed noisily. Then, with a kind of pathetic pride, he said, "All right, I don't wanna wait. Kill me now. If I go to sleep, how'll I know?"

The coven pair didn't move. Their hesitation agonized Gosset, he couldn't take it. He started to curse them, but midway his voice quavered into pleading, and then, unexpectedly, he yawned. It surprised him. It sure seemed weird at such a time.

"Don't fight it," the woman begged. Gosset wondered idly why she felt so bad when he was the one going to die.

Gosset pulled himself together with a

grunt. "Goddam you big sonsabitches, look at me straight and do it!"

But they still turned away, and then the room grew hazy with dots dancing wherever his eyes darted, along the floors, the walls, dots jiggling near the door...

The door.

Someone standing in the door who didn't turn away but held his failing sight in a steel will. The beginnings of a pulsing heat like fever flared in his skull. The fat man put numb fingers to his forehead, then all feeling ceased. His face went slack. Gosset collapsed like a sack of potatoes, whitebrained, his mind a vegetable.

The will that burned his brain closed like a vise around his heart and stopped it.

Shocked, angry and relieved all at once, the Karli god and goddess gaped at Shalane. Turi felt for her old friend's mind, but touched a surface as hard and unreadable as her sister goddess' green eyes.

"You were sick with the chore," Shalane told her. "Now it's done."

"It was our responsibility," Darin said, gravely reproving her, "not yours."

Shalane said nothing.

"We have to live with these things,"

Turi said levelly, conscious of the embarrassed constab rider who'd stood silent behind Gosset during the whole business. "You don't have to, Lane."

An offhanded shrug. "Hell, it was easy. Like stepping on a bug."

Without sparing a single glance for the dead cowan or another word to the god and goddess, Shalane slipped out the door and left Karli.

Ben Santee lay on his back by the tiny fire and gazed with blissful contentment at the thick oak limbs silhouetted against the muted colors of a calm sunset.

"That is an inspiring sight," he decided with conviction. Shaved, dressed in clean cotton, he felt like new. There was no need now to hurry or hide, the danger was gone.

Their camp lay in the high, lush hills just north of a Wengen iron town where Ben had felt the urge to socialize. No one up this way knew his name very well and iron

towns don't much care who a man is, anyhow, so he rode down alone into the village, had a bath, bought some clean clothes and hefted a few drinks with the workers. Gratifying what a man could hear if he just drank quietly and listened.

Ben spun out his news of Ritt and Lee.

"The iron works shipped out some special freezer boxes today. You heard of Corian?"

Lee's memory never stretched beyond yesterday. "Who?"

"Doctor." Ritt remarked. "Goes all over for Garick."

With a nod, Santee took a slug of potato gin from a new jug and passed it to Ritt. "Heard in town that old Corian's going up to the Fist to the Fleeters."

Lee stopped fingering his crotch. He recognized that name, Ben mentioned it a lot, it must be important. "Fleeters?"

"Now, goddammit, Lee, I told you six times who Fleeters is, I ent gonna tell you again. Just listen.

Ben said that while he was in the iron town tavern he heard a worker black as Bowdeen talk about how the new freezer boxes were built special to lug medicine and had just been picked up by Garick's own son.

Santee bought the iron worker a drink in a friendly way. "That right? Garick's boy?"

The black man nodded, guzzling gin. "Now what the hell was his name?"

Santee refreshed his memory. "Arin?"

"That's him. Big red-haired mofo, chilly around the eyes, but soft-spoke. Says he never been up on the Fist before."

"Oh?" Ben was politely curious. "He traveling with Corian?"

The worker swallowed another mouthful. "Said so. Him and his wife going 'long with Cory just for the fun."

Ben smiled at the tree branches etched in stark relief against the scarlet flush of a dying day. What with Rack and Gosset gone, he deserved some luck. "You heard of Arin, Ritt?"

Busy with his own thoughts, Ritt grunted. "Who ain't?"

"You, Lee? Hey!" Ben kicked the boy's foot. "You heard of Shalane?"

Lee swallowed fiery gin and belched.

"She pretty?"

"If you like deepwoods, and you do. She's a goddess, Lee. One of the Devil's own chosen daughters, that's the truth. Gotta go in the circle and get down on a man for that. Right down on him, you know what I mean? There ent nothing you can do a bitch like that ent been done to her before. She was one of them that cleaned out Salvation."

Lee remembered Salvation because Ben talked about it all the time. "That was bad," he nodded sympathetically.

"Babies and all," Ben said darkly. "Cattle, horses, chickens. Nothing left alive. Choked the working shift down in the mines, buried 'em alive."

Lee reached inside his hide shirt to scratch, puzzled by an inconsistency. It took him a while to get it straight, but it seemed worth the effort. "That why we doing it back to them, Ben, right?"

"That's why."

The small fire snapped and sputtered. Santee savored his gin. "Arin and Shalane up on the Fist," he repeated. "Just never know what you'll learn by listening."

Sunset was almost over. The light had faded and bent oak limbs were dim against the sky's subtler reds and deeper blues.

"Guess those two are all Garick's got for family," Ben said softly.

Ritt emerged from his own worries when he caught his leader's drift and heard the unpleasant softness in Santee's voice which Ritt had grown to hate more and more over the years. The hate stemmed from fear: Ben had no bottom to what he might do when somebody crossed him. That worried Ritt. At least Gosset could think straight now and then, though Lee never could think at all. But Ben—the old shrewd brain in the man just rotted away a little more each day.

"Jee-zus shit," Ritt grumbled, "ain't you had enough?" He said it low, not sure he wanted Ben to hear.

The jug lowered from Santee's mouth, untasted. "Enough what, man?"

Ritt jerked a thumb at the tree. "That. We're taking too many chances. There's no need."

"Ent there?" Ben whispered. "We ain't

done yet, Ritt, not yet. Maybe not never."

Wind stirred the wooded hilltop. The ropes that stretched over the tree limbs

creaked with the weight of the hacked bodies swaying slightly in the dawn breeze.

## Marvin Kaye Parke Godwin

Marvin Kaye and Parke Godwin first collaborated on *The Masters of Solitude* to which *Wintermind* is the second volume in a planned trilogy. It is a large work probing large questions like loneliness, the need to live without myth, and immortality. *Wintermind* will be published by Doubleday early in 1982. Their newest effort, an occult novel titled *A Cold Blue Light*, is now in preparation for Berkley Books.

As collaborators, Kaye and Godwin may

be unique since they never work together or even simultaneously on a project, though they are very much in tune philosophically. Both see life as personal choice rather than cosmic scheme, both find death an annoyance; Kaye because he feels it unnecessary, Godwin because there's no smoking.

## COMPACTNESS

Microchips are useful.

You can pour the *Britannica*

into one, the *Americana* into another.

Space colonists can

keep every poet's output (annotated as well)

in the back pocket of their

Levis

and the sum total of humanity's knowledge

in a coffee tin in a

starship's pantry

As man progress, pop out a new chip

(one and a half for leap year)

better make it two if they clone

Jeppson's husband (the future can have its horrors)

You can hollow out every asteroid in our system

and fill it with chips

Still doesn't mean we got the smarts to

use it wisely with the aid

of the heart

We may but it doesn't mean we will.

—Scott E. Green

# George Alec Effinger

---

## The Royal Annie

---

I am sitting in the Royal Annie complex eating my way through a tall mound of boiled crawfish and watching the citizens strolling along the green inside wall of the dome, when I observe this uniformed party walking toward me. He gives me a big hello and I give him a big hello back, because I am always careful to be polite to parties in uniform until I can notice what kind of uniform it is, and because I also notice that the party is a gaff-line officer who comes into the place more often than somewhat, except not at all for four years or thereabout. That is the way with gaff-line officers.

"Isn't this place called Chellie's?" he says to me. He is not looking at me but out toward the dome, which keeps us in and the dead of night out.

"It is," I say, "until recently." I pause to eat a morsel, licking my fingers in a stylish way, and ask him is he just back from a trip in?

He says yes, he is, and he is busy noticing how the four years gone are making changes everywhere. "There is in those days a bit of a barroom down there where the annies gather to pass the time and speak of this and that and meet new friends."

I say, "They gather here now." Perhaps I am less than friendly, but I am in the middle of a long, tough winter and I suspect that this officer is leading to putting the bite on me, and he with all of his trip's pay already blown to who-knows-where.

It means nothing to the officer. He sits down across from me and idly pulls the tail off one of my crawfish. He peels it and eats it and says, "When is Chellie's changed?"

I remember the story well enough. Isn't it I who sits still while that crazy annie spills beer in my lap while she cries bloody murder over the message gram? But I

say nothing of this to the gaff-line officer, because I am suddenly in a mild hurry to remove this party from my table, and likewise from my meal, which I need no aid whatsoever in finishing. I say, "About three years ago." This officer does not recall my face or the fact that I am by nature not so close-mouthed a person as all recall my face or the fact that I am by nature not so close-mouthed a person as all this.

In a moment the gaff-line officer stands again and places the crawfish head back on the platter, which does not soothe me very much. As I suspect, he tries to put the bite on me for twenty-five big ones, but I explain that even though I can afford the price of a good meal I am otherwise very short of big ones, as it is a long, tough winter. This makes the officer not the least bit upset, because I suspect he is not trying too hard to bite the hand that feeds him. He walks away, to another table.

As I turn to watch him, who comes out of the kitchen but Suprina Delphina herself, the former annie who has such a time of it sudsing my person with beer on the occasion of her urgent letter. She is just a few years older now, but she is entirely a new person, as if she goes out to Sears and buys herself a new Delphina, head to toe. And that is very close to what she does, not so long ago.

On that day when the complex is called Chellie's, Delphina is a regular annie meeting clients at the bar. I am sitting at a table drinking a little beer and studying the fungus lines for the next day, and across from me at my table is my former partner, the colorful and now deceased Gray Thumb Danny. He is called Gray Thumb Danny because of an accident one morning when his sporting enthusiasm overcomes his plain sense and he tries to hold back a winning line. He is lucky, I explain to him, that the fungus turns only his thumb gray instead of his head, which is what happens if certain annoyed citizens are allowed to have their way.

Anyway, I am filling myself with the histories of the participants in tomorrow's third lineage, wishing to disturb no one and generally observing Chellie's famous house rules, when a veritable storm of beer breaks over my head. I blink and I look amazed, because for a moment I cannot imagine where such a cool cresting wave can be coming from. My partner Gray Thumb Danny looks every bit as amazed as I. There are no other parties seated nearby, and only the bartender and a weeping annie with an empty pitcher in her hand within hailing range. As my confusion settles down, it begins to seem to me that Delphina, the annie with the pitcher, may prove to be a likely target for my temper. I say to her like so:

"What reasons do you have for sluicing me with beer?" And I ask her other things, and I point out to her pertinent facts, and my language may be just a bit stronger. I am very uncomfortable, as anyone can plainly see, as I am all wet and beery-smelling.

"Oh," says Delphina, weeping even harder into the hanky she has crumpled in one fist, "I have a message and it is the most wonderful news!"

Gray Thumb Danny inquires as to the connection between her good fortune and her urge to drown me as dead as the Man Outside the Dome.

"Oh," says Delphina, patting at her pretty nose, "it is also the worst news I ever see. Look."

I take the gram from her and read it. It informs her in an economy of words that there are recently three hundred and sixty unexplained deaths in the royal family of Somewhere, and that she is in line for the throne. The only hitch is that she has to show up on Somewhere sometime in the next five years to claim her

throne and her treasure.

"Treasure?" says Gray Thumb Danny. A treasure to that late party is an unopened bottle of last week's rye.

"Yes," says Delphina, and a smile appears for a second on her face. When she smiles it is easy for one and all to see why she is one of the most successful annies working out of Chellie's. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"It is, indeed," I say, "but I wish to know what is so bad about the news. You are the new Suprina of Somewhere."

"That is just it," Delphina, frowning again, "I can not afford to go there to claim my throne. 'My throne.' Does it thrill you, too?"

She looks at me meltingly, as though she and I ought to begin a new fund for her trip to Somewhere if I am feeling so inclined, but I begin to explain that I do not have a spare hundred big ones which it would cost if I was so inclined, which I am but it really is a long, tough winter.

I am saved from listening to Delphina's sales pitch, which is a most entertaining one at that, by Chellie himself, who rarely pokes his way into the conversations of his customers, particularly those with the annies under his supervision. He says that if a bank on Somewhere will transfer enough big ones here to Springfield for Delphina to use, she can be on a ship bound for Somewhere in a few days. Delphina is of course delighted by this idea, and immediately flutters around and about making plans and practicing being regal, and altogether forgetting about the beer-soaking incident, which I may tell you I do not, not to this day. But it is no good bringing the matter up. I go back to my handicapper's sheets and pay no more attention.

The next I hear of Delphina's steady march to the throne of Somewhere is a few days later. I am in Chellie's again, eating a very delicious oyster bisque, when Delphina comes to my table and sits down. I graciously invite her to join me for dinner, but she impatiently waves my offer away. "I am going to Somewhere. I am going to claim my fortune and discharge my duties to my subjects."

I admit that I am very glad to hear this piece of news. I ask her if the bank on Somewhere agrees to the transfer of big ones. She says no, they will not because she can not touch the money until she is crowned officially on Somewhere. She goes on to explain that she hunts around the spaceport for a couple of days until she finds a captain who will take her on credit, providing she can get the bank on Somewhere to verify that she will receive this fortune at the end of the journey. This the bank is more than willing to do, and Delphina and the captain strike a bargain, which amounts to passage one-way by slowboat to Somewhere, for a fee of twenty-five thousand big ones which will be collected upon arrival. Delphina is ecstatic. She says that she is spending all of her nest egg cash money for clothing and necessities for the three-year voyage. I never see her look so beautiful and I tell her so. She gets that little twinkle in her eye again but again I tell her no, as the fungus beats me eight straight at the columns in Tammany Square.

That is the last I see of Delphina for almost four years. She goes off with her captain, whose name is Ocmar, on a slowboat to Somewhere. The rest of the story I hear almost as soon as she returns because it is such a good story, and for a long while one citizen and another have a great time telling each other the details, none of which suffers in the retelling. But as I tell it here the facts are moderately true and unadorned because I get the story directly from the crazy annie herself, who I can not help but feel has always a soft spot for me, at least since the beer incident.



It seems that after four or five days in space, the captain invites Delphina to dine at his table, and she accepts because for four or five days she is bored out of her agile mind and she realizes she has three more years of this. They enjoy a pleasant shipboard meal, attended by lesser crew members and a romantic orchestra created by optical and audible electronic magic. After the meal the captain shows Delphina around the ship. At this point she wonders if the captain always wears his dress whites to dinner, as there are no other passengers and formality seems to be elsewhere on board a rare item. Captain Ocmar leads her by the arm from one interesting point to another, and Delphina is so bored she can scream, except that screaming is the one thing she is saving for a really deperate moment of boredom and she does not wish to waste it as she has nothing planned beyond it.

After a time the captain offers Delphina a drink in his quarters and she accepts, because she thinks maybe she could get a little tight and it would not hurt. During their third drink, the captain clears his throat with a little noise and begins to make a speech. He says like so:

"Miss Delphina, rarely is it my privilege to be in the company of such a beautiful young woman as yourself." He goes on at length in these dreary sentiments, until Delphina realizes what he is talking about. He is putting on the warm for her. He has really been dented by Cupid, and for the next three years it is going to be a steady round of romantic dinners and drinks in the captain's quarters.

Delphina says, "Captain Ocmar, I am flattered so much that I can barely tell you. I do not know whether it is I you find so attractive or the fortune and throne at the other end of this journey, and I do not wish to know. But there is one thing. I am a hard-working annie, and we have a trade union, just as space captains have a trade union, and I know that you will understand that if we are to continue on in this particular vein we must come to some agreement."

Captain Ocmar blushes as pink as a kitten's nose. "What do you mean?" he says.

Delphina decides at this time that her captain is a dumb bunny, even though he had been traveling from place to place among the stars for some time and there had been traveling from place to place among the stars some time and therefore must have visited institutions like Chellie's on Springfield. She knows that he must have an idea of what she is trying to say, but when she looks at him, he is all disorganized. The next thought, then, is for Delphina to think that Ocmar is a scrumpy guy after all, as close with his scratch as old Chellie himself, which makes him very scrumpy, indeed. If that is the case, thinks Delphina, there is nothing to do but play him plenty of chill. Dreamy dinners and a drink or three are no little blessing in the captain's cabin of a slowboat, but cut rate passion is not part of her plans for the cruise. Delphina is one hundred percent professional in every respect, first and always, and romance is never a labor of love to her. If that is what the captain is looking for, Delphina is deeply insulted. She is not that kind of doll, or anyway not much. She does not wish to be thought of as the kind of doll who clings to any guy who seems warm enough to tickle her fancy. She tells Ocmar all of this, and she makes it clear that she likes him and thinks that his eyes are practically beautiful, but that she is not sweet on him. Entertaining him under these circumstance would be very wrong.

Entertaining for money, instead, would be business. That is different. She goes on to state as follows:

"It would give me great pleasure to spend the evening with you, discussing one

thing and another, but we will have to protect my honor."

Captain Ocmar looks at her with both eyes. "You are stating me a proposition?" he says.

Delphina decides that he is beginning to get the idea, that he isn't so much a pennypincher as a dumb bunny, after all. She drops the icy act and begins to warm his ear: "If my sisters in the union back on Springfield found out that we didn't make a fair exchange," she says, "they would put the knock on me to everyone. I am first and always a fair and loyal annie," she says.

"I understand," says the captain.

"At last," says Delphina.

"What then do you consider a fair exchange?" says Ocmar.

Delphina smiles her best smile, which is a solid and creditable smile, and which has the effect on most citizens of making them feel a little loose in the knees. "I will not ask for less than my sisters," she says, and she knows that she is right to say that. "And I will not ask for more, because you have been so kind to me. One hundred big ones, Captain Ocmar," she says, "and tonight you can forget the cares of being a captain, except maybe to run now and again to check that we are not running into anything like a star or a big rock."

"One hundred big ones," says Captain Ocmar. He thinks for the first time that maybe he goes into the wrong industry when he goes to captain school as a young man. "I do not have much cash money," he says, "because we do not need it here in the fastness of space. We like to use it all up in port before shipping out."

Once more Delphina's smile gets a little frosty. "Oh," she says, and there is a long quiet time between the two of them.

After a few moments, while he looks at Delphina's charms, at least those that are visible, the captain says, "I am thinking of one thing and another," he says, "and what I can do is deduct the one hundred big ones from the fare you owe to me."

"Oh," says Delphina, but this "oh" is much prettier than the other one. She moves closer to him and they have another drink.

The next morning the captain returns to his duties, and Delphina must spend the day amusing herself, which is more difficult on the ship than she thinks before she leaves Chellie's. She begins to wonder if being the Suprina of Somewhere is worth three years of this, and the whole time she is on Ocmar's ship she never stops wondering this. But in the beginning the three years look like they might take forever, and Delphina's idea of the worst possible way to spend forever is with a nice man with no cash money.

Captain Ocmar is more than somewhat taken with Delphina, and passes that next day with a crooked smile on his handsome, pale kisser. Delphina tells me later that the captain spends a great deal of time telling her of the joys of rocketing around space, of the thrill of the infinite deep, of the beauty of the diamond stars and the sapphire worlds, of the music of silence and the dance of emptiness, and of course Delphina is correct in thinking that he is daffy, indeed. But Captain Ocmar pleads with her to listen, that beside her incomparable gorgeousness the whole universe is like a tin wind-up monkey with a broken spring.

While the captain may be turning somersaults in his control room, Delphina the annie is beginning to look for ways to make the hours go by just a little faster, because they are going by like turtles on crutches. Delphina commences to count the tiny holes in the soundproofing on her cabin's ceiling, and other useful hobbies. She is aboard for six days, and she is feeling at all times a need to cut

loose, and she is not willing to wait a full year until the ship's first scheduled celebration, at which Captain Ocmar will raffle off to a lucky person a dead turkey.

Delphina's desperation is astonishing to behold, but after a few more days of hole counting she gets an idea that will help her kill the time and keep her somewhat luscious figure in shape as well. She decides to make the captain realize that she is even more necessary to his happiness than he thinks already. Delphina sets her cap for him. She says to him like this:

"Dear Captain Ocmar," she says, "why don't you come by my cabin later tonight?"

Captain Ocmar blushes, and Delphina thinks that is kind of cute, after all, and that the captain is sweeter than many of the citizens she meets at Chellie's and around and about.

"I still do not have one hundred big ones in cash money," he says, as sad as a boy with a dead goldfish.

Delphina pretends to consider for a second or three, and says, "I owe you twenty-four thousand, nine hundred big ones," she says. "Come by tonight and we'll have dinner and one thing and another, and then I will owe you twenty-four thousand, eight hundred big ones."

The plan meets with Captain Ocmar's approval, and the evening passes happily. Delphina is surprised to learn that these hours are both profitable and pleasurable for her, which they are, at that.

The first month aboard the slowboat is like spending a month in a dentist's chair waiting for the dentist to start work, or at least that is what Delphina says, and personally I am in no position to deny it. There is nothing for her to do, and she neglects to pack with her such little things as she uses at home to pass the idle time. Delphina inquires of Captain Ocmar if she can maybe cook in the galley, but it is well-known to one and all that cooking is one skill which she possesses in underabundance. This is soon learned by the crew of the ship. The same is true of her talent for anything else useful aboard a slowboat, so that very soon she is back in her cabin counting pinpricks in white ceiling tiles. She begins to long for visits from the captain, which he makes on a schedule that is as regular as his duties allow, what with having to supervise everything on the ship and listening to the complaints from the mostly adolescent crew members. Delphina understands very quickly that these young men are of no interest to her, as they have even less scratch than Captain Ocmar, and she is in debt to none of them, except maybe a boy named Bloon who advises her one morning to avoid the chipped beef. This is good advice, indeed, but Delphina does not value it at one hundred big ones.

While eight weeks slip by in space, Delphina receives Captain Ocmar a total of twenty times. Her debt is now fixed at exactly twenty-three thousand big ones. Twice a week is fine for the captain, but it is not quite enough for Delphina, who is a vigorous doll. It is not that she finds Captain Ocmar so stimulating, as she tells me, but that his visits are the only breaks in the sameness. She is allowed to wander wherever she likes around the slowboat, but after a few days even that is a bore. She looks through round windows, but there is not anything to see except darkness, and she can see that anytime she wishes by putting a bag over her head. There are faint, distant stars, but stars are nothing special and provide only

the most inferior kind of fun. There is only one magazine aboard the ship, and it is printed in Braille. Delphina commences to think about wrestling the booze bottles to pass the time, but that never is her dodge.

The months pass, and the first year passes. At the celebration, Delphina does not win the turkey. On the first anniversary of the beginning of the journey, Delphina figures that she is in debt only thirteen thousand, seven hundred big ones. Captain Ocmar is a frequent and ardent sweetheart, but Delphina is discouraged to find that even this is not making the days fly by. She is prepared to crease the captain's skull when he says like this:

"That is one year down," he says, "and only two more to go!"

Delphina reports to me that nothing happens at all during those next two years, or anyway not much, and that she does not even wish to think about it. It is a slow and weary time, and she begins to look and listen at the strangest things, hoping for amusement. She hears rhythms and melodies in the creaking of the bulkheads. She sees religious signs in the cracks of the walls. She is at all times prepared to commit violence if someone bothers her even the slightest, even though on Springfield she is known by one and all to have a mild temper, at least sometimes.

It is with great joy then that she greets Captain Ocmar for the last time, only hours before they land on Somewhere. At this time the captain has transferred to Delphina a healthy sum of thirty-one thousand, two hundred big ones, as a reward for three hundred and twelve mutually enlightening evenings of this and that. Delphina no longer owes him for passage to Somewhere, and it is certainly a profitable if dull voyage for her, because she is coming out of it a nice six thousand, two hundred big ones to the good, six thousand, two hundred big ones that Captain Ocmar does not have.

"Why," he says, "you know from the beginning that I do not have cash money with me."

"Yes," says Delphina. Her prize smile is gone along with her twenty-five thousand big one debt. "How much are you paid for this trip?"

"Five thousand big ones," says Captain Ocmar sadly.

"Then we must come to some kind of arrangement," says Delphina. "Even after the five thousand big ones, you will still owe me one thousand, two hundred. How do you propose to get the money?"

Captain Ocmar is despondent. He is inconsolable. He is more than somewhat grief-stricken, and Delphina allows him to take his time explaining. She is about to become the Suprina of Somewhere, a real high player, like some of the personalities she meets in Chellie's. The captain states as follows:

"I can not weed you even the five thousand big ones," he says. "I have another creditor, the company that owns this slowboat. I owe sixteen thousand big ones, and they will take steps to end my cheerful existence if I don't pay."

"I may do the same," says Delphina. Captain Ocmar does not wish to notice.

"I will give them the five thousand," he says, "and then sign on for another trip back. In three more trips I will be able to pay them all that I owe them, and then pay you," he says. "I am disgraced and unhappy, indeed."

"I can imagine," says Delphina. "But that will take you over nine years." Now that she is loaded with money, she does not wish to wait for same.

"Yes," says the captain. He is staring at the floor.

"I will take care of you," says Delphina. "I will pay your debt to the company. But then you will have to work for me. Do you understand?" she says. "You will

pay off every big one by taking care of certain chores for me."

"What kind of chores?" asks Captain Ocmar. He is glad to hear that his money problems are over, but he is worried. He does not go through captain school to end up doing something humble. He is also joyful that he is staying with Delphina, annie or not, because love is really putting the slug on his heart.

"I do not know what kind of chores," says Delphina. "I am not thinking about these things yet. Let us see about my throne and my treasure."

That is the easiest part of the whole trip, as I learn from Delphina. She and Captain Ocmar visit the temple of the gods of Somewhere, and a man at a desk directs them to an office on the third floor. Delphina shows the message gram, which is now a little wrinkled from her reading it several times a day for three years. Everyone is so happy to see her, and she is happy to see them, because these are her loyal subjects. Her crown and her scepter are in a pete box in the basement, and they send a young boy down to get them. Her throne is on another continent, but she says she can do without it for a time. What she really wishes to see is her treasure.

There is very little treasure in gold and jewels, and Delphina is sad to hear it. The treasure is in a bank and looks like a string of numbers in a passbook. A very long string of numbers, at that. This makes Delphina feel much better, because she sees that now she is able to do almost anything she wishes. What she wishes, as she thinks about it for a few days, is to go back to Springfield and buy Chellie's and throw out the annies who treat her like a skunk at a double wedding.

Life is all strawberries in champagne for Delphina now, except maybe that Captain Ocmar makes her gloomy, what with the way he hangs around her and gives her the sorrowful hound dog treatment. After a few days, Delphina realizes that she really wishes to return to Springfield as soon as may be, because Somewhere is a nice place to be the Suprina of, but as a place to live it is strictly in a dead heat with the garbage pits of space. For one thing, Delphina gets a headache every morning when she wakes up and looks at the sky. The sky on Somewhere is a kind of awful magenta, the color beet wine would be. Delphina notices that things fall too slow on Somewhere, that if she drops an emerald or ruby, it takes all afternoon and well into the evening to get to the floor, and that is very distressing to her, indeed. And Delphina does not wish to breathe too deeply, because she learns that every time she does this, she throws up. The water on Somewhere tastes the way the alley behind Chellie's smells, and what is even more evil is that the liquor tastes worse. This is no little inconvenience. Furthermore, and what makes up her mind for her at last, is that Delphina learns that no one else on Somewhere has any cash money to spend, because the Suprina has it all, every big one in the place. There is no way for her to make any more money, and as this is the whole point of living, as Delphina states, she wishes to leave this paradise behind, taking only her passbook with its lovely string of numbers.

Captain Ocmar is unhappy to hear this, because he wishes to remain on Somewhere and be the consort of the Suprina, even if he doesn't consort all that much, what with one thing and another, and if he is really just an employee. He says to Delphina as follows:

"What can I do on Springfield?" he says. "I am a space captain."

"You will do certain chores for me," says Delphina. "I will pay your fare back to Springfield, and I will add this to the six thousand, two hundred big ones you

already owe me. How much can you get by selling your captain's license?"

Captain Ocmar is shocked at the very thought, and he states as follows:

"I can not sell my license. It is my whole life."

"It is not your whole life," says Delphina. "The six thousand, two hundred big ones are your whole life. Later, you will buy yourself a new license if you wish."

"Yes," says the captain mournfully, "I will get two thousand big ones for it."

"There," says Delphina cheerfully, "we are on our way." She spends the day gathering her scepter and crown and this and that of her royal jewels. Captain Ocmar spends the day getting muddled up in a saloon on the ground floor of the temple of the gods of Somewhere. The next morning Delphina takes her departure on a fastboat that gets her back to Springfield in a week and a half. She has a much better time on this voyage than on Captain Ocmar's slowboat, even though no one shows her the same kind of attention that he did. Delphina does mind, because she has her crown and scepter to play with.

The captain does not go with her. The fare on the fastboat is ten times the fare on a slowboat, and even though Delphina could buy a fastboat for each of them if she wishes and not spend more than a handful of her royal jewels, of which she has more than a few handfuls, she prefers instead to send Captain Ocmar on a slowboat. Three years alone without her makes him very unhappy, indeed, as does the fact that he is not earning scratch on the trip but merely riding along like a sack of onions.

Delphina walks back into Chellie's and makes a great stir among the citizens as she wishes to do. She wears her crown and carries her scepter, and she sits at a table and drinks beer and tells her story over and over again, until everyone in Chellie's, annies and high players and Chellie himself, is sick to death of hearing it. Some personality in a shiny suit keeps buying Delphina beer to fill her empty glass, which just goes to show how when you have plenty of scratch you never need to unlimber the first big one, because some party will wish to make you think well of him by paying your tab. I say this although personally I am never in a position to find out for myself.

Anyway, with one thing and another, the next few days pass pleasantly, even when Delphina informs Chellie that she is buying his establishment from him and he states that he is never thinking of selling, until Delphina changes his mind with a glance at the long string of numbers in her passbook. Two weeks after Delphina is home, Chellie's becomes The Royal Annie, and Chellie himself retires with his ever-loving wife to a nice house near the wall of the dome, where he does this and that and never comes home smelling like a bar rag soaked in beer.

I think these thoughts as I watch Suprina Delphina moving around and about the tables, greeting citizens and smiling her well-known smile. I finish my plate of crawfish and stand up. Delphina catches my eye, and when she catches an eye it stays caught. I say hello and she gives me a hello right back, but I am in somewhat of a hurry to leave the place before she commences to sell me on the idea of spending a little more cash money on this and that.

At the door, the janitor of The Royal Annie, who is none other than Captain Ocmar himself who has been back on Springfield for a year now, is carrying a tub of oyster shells out to the alley. It is not the most fragrant of jobs, but the captain is happy in his work because he is near Delphina at all times. Even after the three years on the slowboat, and his months as her janitor, Captain Ocmar is still daffy. He says to me as follows:

"Would you wish to buy a tip on tomorrow's lines?" he says. There is nothing



sadder than to see a proud space captain carrying pails of garbage, unless it is seeing the same man touting tips.

"Why are you hustling tips?" I say. "Does Delphina not pay you well for doing her chores?"

"Yes," he says glumly, "but I do not see cash money from her. She takes my wages out of the debt I owe her. But if I can put together on hundred big ones from time to time, then by and by I may visit her of an evening, and we discuss this and that as we used to." It is clear to me that Captain Ocmar's daffiness is due to his being a guy nuts about a doll, which is liable to make him very daffy, indeed. I slip him five big ones, even though it is a long, tough winter. His is a condition that will touch anybody's heart.

Just then two citizens come into The Royal Annie. They are talking about Delphina, and one party says to the other, "She is as pretty as a fourth ace, and very charming to speak to."

"She is the sweetest doll on Springfield," says Captain Ocmar, "and I will personally deal with the party who puts the knock on her."

The second citizen raises his eyebrow. "You see," says his friend, "she is well thought of around and about."

"She is over there," says the captain, "with a posy over her ear. But she will not receive you unless you are a high player."

"Why," says the second citizen, "we are very high players."

"Then you will find her most cordial, indeed," says the captain. He goes out into the alley with his bucket of oyster shells. I watch him go, and I think of what my late partner, Gray Thumb Danny, always says, that there is no advertisement like a satisfied customer. And I think that there is a lot of truth in what he says, at that. ●

---

### Afterword

"The Royal Annie," is part of a series I am beginning. Each story is set on Springfield. Each story looks at a different stratum of society there, focusing on one part of the varied and transient culture I have set up. The idea of the series is that each story is an attempt to capture the sort of story a well-known author (who never wrote science-fiction) might have written if he or she had been attracted to our field. These are not parodies or pastiches; I am after more than mere style-copying. I want to do the kind of story, the point of view, the attitude, the tone these fine authors would have chosen, but dealing with an authentic science fiction story. Not just a typical story

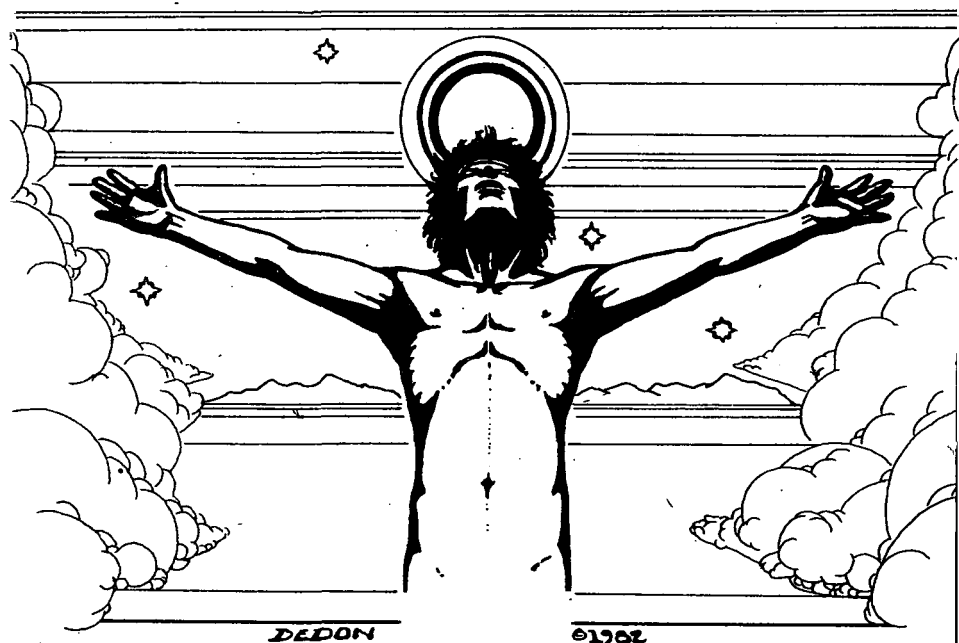
of theirs with sf trappings thrown in. "The Royal Annie," for instance, is a Damon Runyan story, but one that couldn't happen without slower-than-light interstellar travel. I have almost finished the Hemingway story and the Steinbeck story, and have planned a Flannery O'Connor story and a Ring Lardner story. I have a whole notebook of ideas for others, all my favorite writers who could lend themselves to this sort of thing, all set on Springfield, all fitting together into a mosaic that describes the place better than a single point-of-view ever could.

# **John Steakley**

---

# **FLYER**

---



**Illustration by Deb Dedon**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hang from my spine.

The lift is centered there, some four to six inches on either side of the vertebrae, from upper neck to lower back. The support in my legs is comparatively minor (stiffness, essentially, from upper thigh to mid-calf) and I must actually be aloft and at speed before its effects are felt.

My arms hang loosely beneath me, to be pushed back to my sides by the rushing winds. I do not hold them out before me in a childish manner. I am not Superanybody. If you think you have seen something else, you have not seen me. It was only in your mind...

Felix first mentioned the dreams to his aunt while helping her break green beans into a brown paper sack. She laughed at his story, delighted with the extent of his seven-year-old imagination. The next morning he tried telling her more, but she wasn't having any. The third time he tried, she lectured him about fibs and told her husband, who boxed his ears and graphically described future punishments for "nasty lying little boys".

There was no fourth time. Not ever.

Seven years later, fourteen and dreaming still, he went to the library. Having heard such things were done, he expected to read all about himself. About the real Felix. Yet no Felix, real or otherwise, was to be found in any of the dream books he read. No psychiatric theory, however intellectual or sexy, and no psychic vision, however cosmic, had anything to do with him. All were equally irrelevant to the case of a young man who dreamed, not just occasionally of flying, but always and only of flying. For Felix had spent every night, nap, and daydream—since the day he was born—aloft.

As he grew, so did the dreams. They became more sharply focused, crystal clear, and always recalled. They were his best friends, the dreams. He was enthralled by their realism, enraptured by their beauty.

And addicted to their comforting hope.

Sally found him a delightful contrast to her fellow students. She found his tragic plight—that of a poor intellectual who must work in a record shop—extremely romantic. Her last three years at school were spent echoing his amused disdain for the rabid intensity of her fellow child-executives and hiding a growing conviction that she was just as ambitious as they.

Good grades got her a good job with a growing firm. Nights were spent with Felix still, who viewed her daily hustle as a quaint, but temporary phase before the inevitable implementation of his stirring (and quite undetailed) Master Plan. Sally responded dutifully with self-disparaging "selling out" jokes while wondering just when the hell this big move was going to be made.

One night she saw they no longer spoke. The next night, with her urging, they had one of those great deep philosophical discussions she had loved so much when she had first met him. It wasn't until the next day when this very act of reliving the past, of actually having become the same person she had been three years before, appalled her.

Her next lunch hour was spent watching him at his counter and sighing. This tall brown haired, brown eyed, sexy young man she loved had changed not one inch in three years.

A week later, she spent a long weekend trying to be objective. By Sunday night she was forced to admit two truths. One: he was still, by God, the only one who could make her happen; but, Two: he had nothing further to offer than that.

"I'm leaving," she said in a quiet voice.

Felix knew enough to panic. This was not fight-talk. This was the boom.

"I love you, Felix," she said, interrupting his protests, "And I like you, too. Even when you don't move I like you, because you do sort of carry it well.

"But I'm still leaving you."

Felix, hating himself for not hiding his shining eyes, realized suddenly, belatedly, that he would do anything to keep this girl.

"Dammit," he choked, "what's wrong? Tell me that. What do you want me to change?"

"Nothing," she replied firmly. "I wouldn't...I couldn't improve on you."

"Then what do you want?"

"More. More you, if that were possible. Not different. More."

"Huh?"

"You're only half there. Half-caring, half-interested, half-ass. You don't do anything."

"I will when I find it," he replied doggedly through his tears.

"Felix, how can you find what you don't bother to look for?"

"I'm looking. In my own way."

A week later, he tried to see her, but when she answered his knock at her door and he saw a man in her living room, he realized it was really over.

Dazed, stunned, he felt completely vulnerable to everything and everyone. There was no place to hide. No thought was safe, no fantasy immune.

So he slept. Constantly. Eighteen hours a night, all during lunch, he slept. And, of course, flew. But that got tougher and tougher until he simply could not dream anymore, and he awoke on a Sunday afternoon with a moan of wretched self-pity and an incredibly erotic image of Sally on the arm of her Bright Young Man.

He wouldn't give in to it. He wouldn't be reduced to *that* fantasy. It would mean that he really was beneath her. He lay, sweating, staring at the ceiling for hours, refusing to give in. It was his first-ever display of real willpower.

At last, exhausted, he slept. But not safely, not deeply. Sally appeared even here, drifting through pale clouds and baby blue sky. She was naked.

He rose from beneath her. Slowly at first, then faster and faster. Now naked too, and filled with that strident, bursting, need, he flew as never before. He did not float or glide as in the past. He drove upward, punching through the air until...

Their shattering impact was a flash of white and flesh and erupting...pain!

He awoke instantly, his forehead seared through with agony, and saw that he had fallen out of bed and banged his forehead bloody on the white rough-textured paint of the...

His floor was carpeted.

His ceiling was white.

He was flying.

"Oh, God," he whispered and fell, faithless and unworthy, back onto the bed.

He could neither move nor think. He could do nothing but lie there spread-eagled, his eyes riveted on the bloody smear caused by the impact of his forehead against...the ceiling!

When at last he slept again, it was a deeper sleep than ever before. There were no dreams.

When he awoke this time, it had become dark and the ceiling was in shadows. He stood up to turn on a light but froze when his hand neared the switch.

What if it had been a dream? What if the stain wasn't there?

He sat back down, in darkness, and worried. Then he tried to do it again.

He became rock-taut with concentration and nothing happened. He tried concentrating harder, straining until her trembled, and still nothing happened. He fought back the tears and panic. He forced himself to grow calm. He tried again. He didn't move.

So it had been just another damn dream, after all, he thought bitterly. And then the tears couldn't be helped.

"It's so unfair!" he whispered hoarsely to the shadows. "It was so real!"

He started to turn on the lights again, to just end it all right there, but stopped himself once again. It had been a great dream. The greatest of them all. He had felt so strong and so real. He closed his eyes, permitting himself a final fantasy. He saw the clouds again and the sky. And Sally floating and himself driving upwards. Reliving it touched, once more, that special nerve.

When he opened his eyes, suddenly, he was four feet in the air.

When he lifted off from his balcony, he banged his shins against the iron railing.

It was ugly. It was incredibly awkward. He lurched and fell several feet and slid sideways. He had neither style nor grace nor any but the merest pitiful excuse for control. And he didn't know what to do with

his arms.

He blundered against his apartment building, scraping his face on the bricks. He jounced obscenely about in a tangle of power lines for so long it was an absolute miracle that he wasn't electrocuted. He was helpless to control his inane fear of heights.

Yet he was aloft. And finally, after putting aside his childish fears, he let loose and soared. The lights of an intersection sparkled beneath him. The street lamps flowed past on either side, looking like a runway in the sky. Instinctively, he accelerated down their length.

It was hardly smooth, of course. But it was, at least, firm. Faster and faster he drove, tears fluttering, until the lumbering autos seemed frozen in place below him. Ahead of him, he saw where the street lights ended, and as he passed the last glowing pair his head lifted back and he rose, majestically, triumphantly, into the night.

The boulevard shrank to a minor street, then to a lane, and then to a gently curving country road and still he rose. The wind rushed over and around him, crisply caressing. The clouds drew him firmly upward into their warm lower mists, soaking him gently, closing at his back. Then there was only the rush of their tender yielding until...

Freedom. The sky was forever. The moon was spectacular and benign. It glowed pure snowy white on the velvet hills and canyons of the clouds.

And the ice-diamond stars.

Essential significance. Fierce inevitability.

Life without shadows, at last. He had arrived.

He learned quickly. About climbing and falling, about soaring and gliding, about the easy grip of hovering and the staggering jolt of blind acceleration. He learned about air currents and thermals and how to recognize objects on the ground. Too dangerously, he learned about the limits imposed by his near-constant need for food.

He was always hungry, it seemed. The twenty-eight dollars in his wallet lasted him only three days. Trembling still after spending his last dime at a small lakeside cafe, he was reluctantly forced to admit that

he was very near complete exhaustion.

But still he rose and flashed away into the early morning air, rocketing scant inches above the still surface of the lake.

Trailing his fingers in the water threw up misty rainbows into the dawn sunshine. He laughed aloud at the beauty of this, light-headed, dizzily unconscious of the danger. A white cabin cruiser appeared around a curve of the shoreline, riding easily on the gentle morning swells. Two middle-aged fishermen stood in the stern, ignoring their rods for steaming mugs of coffee. On impulse, he veered towards them. Giggling hysterically, he drove his hands into the water up to his wrists and accelerated. He laughed out loud as he flashed across their stern, a rocketing mystery sprouting a thirty-foot-high roostertail. He stayed in the water until he was out of sight around a wooded point. He was straining hard now against the resistance, but determined to leave no clue.

Only then, when he tried to rise above the looming rocky shoreline, to come about and laugh at their thunderstruck faces, did he see his error. Strain as he might, he simply had no lift. His head swam, his vision doubled and glazed over.

He slammed into the water like a stone.

He bounced once, twice, tumbling wildly. He swallowed water through a cry of pain. He struck the gravel covered shore shoulder first, driving the air from his lungs in an instant. He rolled over and over, arms and legs careening numbly. He came to a stop in a crumpled heap at the edge of the weeds. He fainted.

He awoke to a chilling breeze and the sight of the orange sun easing steadily into the far horizon of choppy waves. He hurt everywhere. He was afraid to move, afraid to find out how badly hurt he might be. He tried lifting just as he was.

He rose, sighing with relief, into a weak but steady climb. It was over four hours later before he collapsed, heaving and shaking, onto his balcony—a mere two hundred miles away.

But he had learned, by God, to fly.

OCT. 14 Thurs. 11:45—Boy, am I weird!  
Ate a bunch of food waiting for the pizza man to show up with two Giant Specials.  
Then I eat about three guys' worth just like

that and the only reason I stop at all is because my stomach was hurting. it stopped hurting in a couple minutes though. But when I got up to put the rest of it away I ended up eating it all instead and scaring the hell out of myself. Wonder what I am now?

OCT. 15 Fri. 6:15 PM—George called from store. Am I alright and such. I guessed, said I was. He wanted to know was I sure and I said yeah and he said: "Well, alright," and got quiet. I just sat there on the phone listening to the music and the cash register in the background and then all of a sudden George starts shouting at me to get down there right away. Said it was already after six. He said he didn't give a blue damn and didn't of course and I felt real bad and said I'd hurry. But then I saw me in the mirror and can't believe how bad I look!

Oct. 16 Sat. 2:15 AM—God, I thought it'd never be over! Going out. And up!

4:30 AM—Felt real good. Did GREAT dive into downtown, coming out of it between the skyscrapers like a big canyon. And some dumb highway patrol guy was sitting out past the loop with his radar on! At three in the damn morning! Peed on his hood and windshield. He got mad as hell, out of that car and shouting around in circles and sniffing. Funny as hell.

Got lost again coming back. Damn, it's easy to do. Weird how city looks like thick forest when you come in low.

Supposed to be at store in four hours! Gotta sleep!

5:15 AM—Don't know how I'm gonna get through tomorrow. Hate it! So damn boring and I keep thinking about just taking off right out the door but I need money to fly!

5:30 AM—Don't guess I'll tell anybody yet.

5:45 AM—No matter what, I can't just take off and go. Even if I got a million dollars for all my stuff, I can't just be a floater. No more! This is my NEW LIFE!

6:00 AM—With my car and stereo and clock radio and hair dryer and dishes and records and the rest it comes out to about \$3,130. Plus I got about \$168.37 in savings. So \$3,298.37.

But I gotta sleep somewhere. Gotta sleep now! Got less than two hours!

12:30 PM—George said he wasn't gonna

bug me about it but he started, of course. I told him he promised and he got mad as hell.

Julie said he called cops and hospitals when I was gone. Said I should've called in. I said I couldn't and she said why not and when I didn't answer her she said I didn't have to tell her but I owed it to George.

Then she went over to George and they whispered a lot. She was putting me down, I bet. But if she thinks she's gonna get my job she's full of it! Gotta go!

8:30 PM—Damn George! Even acted like I should've stayed later! And he KNEW I should've left at five.

I've had enough almost.

9:30 PM—DAMN rain! Rain's okay. But lightening? Supposed to clear up by ten.

11:30 PM—Airport guy says planes get struck all the time. Damn. Nothing on television. Figures.

Oct. 17 Sun. 1:30 AM—Just thinking. What would I have done to get toffy? What wouldn't I have done? Some rich guy could kidnap me for the secret. If scientists can't find out how I do it, then I'd be a real target because some mafia guy or rich guy wouldn't believe I didn't know. Besides, I don't want doctors poking around in me anyway.

Secret identity, how 'bout? Get a cape too!

Rain stopped.

4:15 AM—Comic books are stupid when guy is always spotting crimes. Even warehouse district dead and dark except for cop cars. And nobody goes to our downtown at night.

Besides, what if some insane guy started shooting at me some place? Bullet-proof vest is too thick for a costume.

And the money! Who do they make out the checks to, Mr. Flyman? And the internal revenue would want to know who I was. And if one guy knew then all of 'em could find out. Probably would. Some crazy government guys could sneak into my mansion when I was sleeping. Or a bomb!

12:30 PM—Ate four bowls of cereal and all the bologna. I need to get vitamins!

4:30 PM—Drove out of town and snuck up. Great day but I had to stay up too high to see anything or everybody could see me. Took forever to drive back. Calling pizza



man!

7:15 PM—Different Ways:

Show business = too risky.

Show business with secret ID = too risky too.

But hate record store! Gotta be there until seven tomorrow night! Going up.

Oct. 18 Mon. 12:00 AM—Stayed with 747 easy. Just can't go as high. 700 mph?

12:15 AM—Ticket lady thought I was nuts because I didn't know the flight number. Said most 747s do about 500 mph though. Still pretty good.

2:45 PM—Told George I was sick. Got costume instead. Great looking black shirt with puffy sleeves like Errol Flynn and black pants. Both look like silk but aren't. Got money belt to carry money and this. Cutting up satin pillow case to make hood.

3:45 PM—Looks great with boots! Look better with black dancing slippers though, because after I tie the hood behind my neck the extra strips of satin hang down my back and if I had shiny black slippers I'd look like the Whirling Dervish. Still look like Ali Baba and Cat Burglar or maybe James Bond.

4:15 PM—SPY!!! Duh! I can go anywhere!

4:30 PM—Told George I was gonna be sick til Friday. Wants Doctor's excuse! Should've told him to shove it. I said I'd check in and all, but if I get to meet the President it won't matter.

Oct. 19 Tues. 1:15 AM—Five hours and thirty-two minutes! Could've gone faster but didn't want to push it. Kinda like I was in a spell or hypnotised after awhile. Felt good but scared me.

Plus: Could've gone even faster than that if I'd gone straighter.

2:00 AM—Bummer! White House all dark. Gonna put my initials on Washington Monument.

6:00 AM—Whew! That ocean is BIG! Got turned around and couldn't remember what dipper to use. Lucky!!! Sleeping on beach.

6:30 AM—Beach stinks. Brown water! Staying in forest.

5:45 PM—White House cop says somebody is ALWAYS picketing. Mexican guy showed me oval office window and then tried to get me to carry his sign while he ate. He said I would if I cared about

justice and Puerto Rico being a state.

Should've brought more clothes.

8:30 PM—Oval office light is on! Here goes!

9:15 PM—Must be some kind of radar! Bunch of guys came out holding guns like they had in Viet Nam. Two choppers, too. Slow as hell.

Gonna go in lower.

10:00 PM—No way!! Radar must be in lawn because I wasn't two feet above the ground. Those guys were all over, looking in the trees even. More choppers too. And searchlight winged me but they still didn't see me.

11:00 PM—Tin Foil! Of course! Like hot rod guys used to put in their grilles for the cop radar! Gonna make me a shield with it and a cardboard box I got in an alley.

Oct. Wed. 1:15 AM—Shield sure made a dandy target in those damn searchlights. Shredded the hell out of that cardboard like it was confetti. If I hadn't dropped it, they'd've shot me too! Lucky!!!

Maybe the Vice President or a Senator first. Then only two guys would know.

3:30 AM—Alright!!! Paper says President leaving for California in private Air Force One tomorrow. All I need to do is wait til he's alone in his private bedroom.

Buying laundry marker for sign.

5:00 AM—Made three signs so we can talk.

1. Don't tell anybody I'm out here.

2. Make your own sign.

3. Where can we meet?

Decided not to tell him who I am in case he ever writes it down. Tore out front of this.

11:30 AM—Chopper just got him. Gonna follow to Andrews Air Force base!

It said: "The United States of America" and bore Presidential Seals. It was blue and silver, shining with a just polished sheen. It was huge. It was very fast.

It was ugly.

The engines were fiercely hot. They buffeted him with searing blasts. And it would not stop climbing.

Felix found them behind the rear-most windows. She was unmistakable with her chisled chin, hard teeth, and hair-helmet. She was sitting on the bed, pillows propped against the wall. Bent over at the foot of the bed was a man Felix had never seen. He

wore white boxer shorts stretched tight over a spherical gut bisected by a ridge of tufted black hair that stopped just below his chest. His face was dead slack, idiot-like. His hair was tousled. His tongue peaked out. He was a blob. And the President.

He was clipping his toenails onto the floor with a gold clipper, ignoring a cascade of remarks from her small tight mouth. In disgust, she stood up and placed a small trash can at the foot of the bed. It bore his seal. But he ignored the can and her, clipping the ivory chips onto the dark blue carpet as before.

Felix needed him alone. The plane continued to climb.

She became incensed at his behavior. She railed against him, gestured sharply, even pounded a small tight fist into the soft cream bedspread. When he began to clip them onto the bed itself, she rose and stormed out.

His face warped wide with hysterical laughter, giving to himself what he would not give to her. Felix's first sign, covering the window, was ignored while the clippings were cheerfully gathered at last and carefully placed under the rumpled bedspread where she had sat.

He continued to laugh, not looking out, while the plane continued to rise. It was very cold now. Felix could hardly breathe. So he knocked, hard.

The laughter subsided abruptly. The gut miraculously disappeared as he sat up and turned to the window. At first he saw without seeing. Then the eyes focused on Felix and his sign. They stared at one another from four feet away.

Then the eyes went wide and rolled to white. He clutched at his chest with the hands that held the gold clippers.

Felix plummeted violently, slicing sideways, toward warmth and distance. The signs scattered, separating lazily in the blue Virginia sky.

Some of the bargain hunters ceased their avid touching-questioning-arguing long enough to join Felix at the TV set for a view of the caissons and drooping flags. Some wept. Then the sale would resume with its former urgency. Soon everything was

gone, even the set.

Felix, still in flying black, sat on the couch and re-read every word accompanying the bold headlines and black bordered inauguration photographs.

It was, he felt, as if he were reading about another country. Or another species. He didn't feel involved. There was no guilt. But he HAD done it, he kept reminding himself. He, Felix, had killed the President of the United States. He had scared him to death.

Felix gathered the cash together and put it in his belt. He stomped loudly through the rattling newspapers to the balcony. He took his hood from his back pocket and shook it out. He put it on and tied it tight.

He flew away. In broad daylight.

There was enough money for three months of clouds and stars. Of sailing, soaring, falling. Filling. His talent steadily grew. He honed in fervently with razor-sharp aerobatics amid skyscrapers and mountain peaks. More important was the purging he achieved by thundering non-stop from one sea to the next. He found that with ten solid hours at his absolute maximum velocity—entered and arrow-straight—he could hurtle the continent.

He did not stop until he had reached the Rockies.

Perched on the spur of a ridge, he found an ancient line-shack. The trail that had once served it had been long demolished by an avalanche of granite boulders and Colorado winters. Only a climber could reach it now.

He moved in eagerly to his waiting home.

*Jan. 1 12:00 AM— This is already a better year. This year I have not expected too much. This year I have not fought with George or wept for Sally or half-drowned in a lake. This year I have not killed an ugly powerful man. I haven't even seen a President, this year. And I don't intend to.*

*9:30 AM—My stores are very low. What little produce I steal from passing trucks won't do it. I cook badly, hating it.*

*But I need something. I fly now in a way unimaginable three months ago. And that means more food.*

*But where? How? If not as a spy or superstar and for damn sure not selling records—what's left?*

*Am considering crime, part-time.*

*But what crimes? Theft? Who hides money on top of buildings? And burglary means sneaking in past supposedly snoring, occasionally well-armed people. In the dark, yet.*

*Robbery? I'm perfect for getaways, but I'd still have to walk in through the front door. And I'd have to carry a gun. Would I shoot someone to stay alive? Yes. But could I really put them in that spot...*

*How about crooks, though? I could do that okay. But where do I look for rich crooks that the cops haven't already searched? Vegas? Mafia casinos? But I'd still have to walk through the front door.*

*What I need is a safe, semi-acceptable crime requiring air travel.*

*11:45 AM—Smuggling dope. I'd rather marijuana but cocaine is a lot lighter. No. No heroin, of course.*

*Coke, then. From South America to your door. Better arrange an advance sale with somebody—I can't picture myself pushing to strangers with my hood on. And I won't fly without it.*

*So. I'll head home tonight and go around the bars I used to hear rumors about.*

*10:30 PM—The Monday after New Year's. Not a soul in sight. Some good news. "High Times" magazine says there's enough money in this that I should only have to do it once or twice a year. Ready for home. Guess I'll try one more bar, though.*

*Jan. 2 Tues. 3:30 AM—It happened again. I don't understand why I don't feel worse this time than before. Especially since I meant to do it.*

*Felix agreed to meet the two of them, Zack and his dark companion, behind the bar to discuss details. When he arrived they were already waiting, tense and violent, in the dead blackness of the alley. He tried to run but they were much too quick. The first blow slammed him to the ground. He tried crawling away from their hideous grasping and muttered vileness. But the alley was closed and the ground was covered with unknown reeking garbage that rattled and*

*rumbled beneath him. Something ran across his chest and he lifted instinctively.*

*His head smacked horribly against the rusting fire escape he couldn't see and he fell. Someone, Zack, grabbed him as he fell. He pounded Felix with fists and knees. Felix screamed and lifted again, with Zack clutching tightly to his legs.*

*Then Zack was screaming and screaming and cursing and holding on with every last ounce of strength. Felix felt teeth sink into his thigh. He accelerated, still climbing. He jerked violently to the left, then to the right, then spun and Zack was somersaulting lazily through the air, screaming and screaming.*

*His screaming stopped when his leg tore a gaping hole in the sharply tilted skylight. For a moment he hung there and Felix thought he was going to make it. But then the leg ripped free and he began to slide. Splattering blood and glass, Zack slid down the length of the skylight and off the roof. He fell fourteen stories.*

*"They must have thought I had it on me," muttered Felix. Then he banked and flew away to the faint sound of the other man's voice calling for Zack.*

*The deer was incapable of seeing danger in the skies. A bird, even one as big as Felix, couldn't harm him. Not a twelve point buck.*

*They began with impromptu races, spontaneous sprints across the grassy mountain glade from treeline to treeline. "Wrestling" amounted to little more than feinting up and back with flashing horns and waving arms and trying to get the other guy to back up a step.*

*Tag was best, their mutual favorite. Forever "It", Felix would dart after his friend through the maze of tangled undergrowth and low-hanging branches. Try as he may, he was never able to match the buck's elusive bounding rhythm. But he loved it anyway.*

*Thus was spent the first spring fortnight. Mornings around nine, they would materialize on the glade. Felix used a watch to know when. The deer used something else.*

*When he found himself still alone one*

morning at a quarter to ten, Felix assumed his watch was slow. By eleven he had astonished himself with the depth of his hurt feelings. It was some minutes later before he thought of hunters.

By noon he was circling for the last time before moving the search to the game paths. There were at least two dozen places that had to be visited in the forest maze.

Seeing the blaze of tan amidst the leafy gully floor, he thought of a fall and of perfect running tools horribly splintered. His approach was a too-loud racket of snapping twigs and urgency.

The deer was there. It was unhurt. Beside him, hooves tucked delicately beneath her, was the doe. The twelve points were dipped toward Felix, reluctantly perhaps, but firmly enough. Nice as Felix was, the couple did not need a bird here. Her soft and gentle gaze held neither apology nor malice. Felix searched her eyes briefly for approval, settling instead for a steady glowing warmth that rested easily upon him as he turned around and strode politely away.

Felix was halfway through his farewell walk across the glade when he saw the man coming toward him. He froze and looked around. He sighed. The nearest highway was eighteen miles away through stubborn terrain and here he was without even a canteen to explain how he had done it. Felix knew how the man had done it. He had seen the lodge from the air. He sighed again, cursing under his breath. He was caught.

The man was something over sixty and frail-looking. He had white hair, a red wool shirt, and a shaky grip. His green eyes virtually shone with the crisp clarity of both cunning and wisdom. Nevertheless, he chose to ignore the obvious mystery.

He knows, thought Felix. He's seen me.

"I'm Ryan," offered the man with a wry grin. "This is my mountain."

"Nice job," replied Felix in turn.

Ryan gestured downslope. "My lodge is in there about a half-mile. You're welcome to lunch if you don't mind the walk."

"I like to walk," answered Felix with a straight face and steady gaze. Ryan returned the gaze easily. He grinned, displaying awareness, genuine warmth, and perfect teeth, in that order.

Damn, thought Felix as they walked.

Damn.

They ate and Ryan spoke. He was sixty-two, a widower, and Big-time Rich. Felix had heard of several of his companies. When they had finished eating, they sat there in silence. Then Ryan stood up abruptly, and gestured for Felix to follow. They climbed three sets of stairs and stepped out through an attic door onto a broad sun deck ringed by the tips of Aspen trees. The roof of the forest was spread at their feet. Ryan took a canvas cover off a large bulky telescope—the largest Felix had ever seen.

Felix barely hesitated. He stepped past the older man and put an eye to the lens. His cabin, over four miles distant and a thousand feet above them, seemed close enough to touch. Felix lifted his head. He was trembling with...Anger? Or was it fear?

Ryan stood at the edge of the deck, his back to Felix, his hands in his pockets.

"Seen all kinds of beauty. The arts and the wild and all. I've seen everything." He turned back around slowly, facing Felix. "But there's not a sight under God that can match you shooting out of that cabin into the sky."

"What do you want," asked Felix coldly.

Ryan grimaced, thought a moment. "I want to know about it."

"What do you want to know? How it's done maybe?"

Ryan met the stony gaze. "Okay. Yeah. And more...How it feels and what all you can do and...Damn it, Son, you know what you got here?"

Felix's voice was ice. "I'm the only one that knows."

"But look, Son...I can't go on just calling you Son..."

"Sure you can," growled Felix. Then he saw the hurt in the old man's eyes. He relented. "I can't give this to you, Ryan. I don't even know how it works myself."

The frail shoulders sagged visibly. The green eyes clouded briefly. Then the hurdle was passed.

"Thanks for saying that part right out, Son. I kept telling myself it couldn't be that easy. But still, I'm glad to have clean dead." He squared his shoulders, drew himself up. "Now, Son. You got a friend? You got a woman? Someone who knows?"

Felix shook his head.

"Thought so," said Ryan. "Nobody you want to trust and maybe no one you'd care to put through all that frustration."

"Well, I know now, have for awhile. There's no secret to save around here. So why not take advantage of it? Bend my ear. You never know. Sometimes things said out loud have a different spark. Could help a lot to talk to somebody."

Felix sighed, bending again to the telescope. Actually, the old man had a pretty good idea on the surface. But like a lot of good ideas, like a lot of things, this one had nothing to do with him.

A confidante? Couldn't the old man see how much trouble he was having just keeping up with human conversation?

Felix straightened. "I...appreciate your offer. But I can't see it. I don't need to talk. Just the opposite. I can hardly stand still as it is."

Ryan, crestfallen, returned quickly. "What do you need?"

Felix thought for a moment. "Food. I need to eat a great deal."

"Food, is it? Yeah, I guess you do burn it some at that. Tell me, Son: How many questions could you sit still for if I put up a month's supply?"

"Two months," replied Felix quickly. "In advance. In cans."

"Okay, two months of food. But how many questions?"

"One."

"One!!?"

"One question," said Felix, grinning, "and a ride."

"Done!" snapped Ryan with wide eyes. They shook on it. "I can have the food here by tomorrow night. Enough for five or six giants."

"Okay," said Felix. "I'll be back tomorrow night." He half-turned away, paused, then smiled at the old man. "You ready?"

Ryan, face flushed with excitement, could only nod.

Felix nodded in return and lifted straight up. At around one hundred feet he did a slow roll and accelerated smoothly away.

Ryan, gasping, sat down on the desk with a thump. His eyes filled with tears. He gulped.

"Hot damn!" he whispered hoarsely.

The next night, payment made, they stood on the deck as before. "Shoot," said Felix nervously.

Ryan's mouth worked, obviously deciding between favorites. "Are you human?" he asked abruptly.

Felix blinked. "Huh? Uh...I never thought about it. Hmm. Maybe not." He shuddered, frowned at Ryan.

"You sure you can do it with two?" asked Ryan.

Felix smiled. "Easy. Come on." He picked up Ryan as though he were a child and held him to his chest. He couldn't believe how light the old man was. Big, once-sturdy bones held only the merest possible flesh. Ryan, he noticed, was not looking at him. Okay, he thought.

"Okay," he said and lifted them smoothly upward toward a pale half-moon.

Ryan saw his mountain as only birds and a single human being had seen it. First, from a thousand feet, came the panorama. The wisps of cloud parted to show the rugged stone and forests and glittering waters all tinted with myriad tones and shades of deep, life-rich lunar blue. Warm and shimmering. Moments later they were gliding along just above the sparkling surface of the river, banking lazily as it meandered through the trees. From the river they rose over the forest, skimming the topmost leaves. Next they circled the mountain itself, rising higher and higher in ever-tightening spirals to the summit. Ryan rested a weathered hand on the peak which had tapered to a size little larger than a doorknob.

On the way down the far side Ryan spotted a mountain climber's piton shining dully in a crack above a two thousand foot gorge. Each used a free hand, rocking it back and forth to dislodge it and Ryan clutched it to his chest like a precious treasure.

Felix shifted his cargo slightly to keep his arms from cramping and brushed against buttocks which were quite literally skin and bones. Surrounded by his bounty, Ryan had the physique of a concentration camp victim. Felix started to ask, thought better of it. Ryan coughed nervously, unnecessarily, his only hint of a plea.

Felix decided then to give him all of it.

"Hang on, old man!" he shouted gaily, and turned it on.

They streaked out over the river valley, accelerating tremendously, climbing steadily at a thirty degree angle. At three thousand feet and two hundred miles per hour, Felix abruptly relaxed. They rolled slowly forward, as if atop the highest of rollercoasters, and fell straight down toward a fairy-tale pine grove.

"You're supposed to yell: 'Wheeeee!' when we go over the top," said Felix into Ryan's ear. Ryan looked at him, his face framed by a toothy ecstatic smile, and shook his head in awe. Felix waited a long time to start pulling them out of it. When they began to level off, they were higher than twenty feet above the needle-like treetops. "Wheeee!" they yelled simultaneously and then laughed hysterically at themselves. This burst of laughter set off another and still another. Ryan wiped tears of joy and wind from his eyes.

Felix thought he could do this forever.

At two AM they alit beside the telescope. They slumped to the deck, exhausted, but still giggling like two especially naughty schoolboys. They lay there for several moments, recovering their breath. Ryan poked Felix's side with his toe.

"That," he gasped, "was one hell of a ride."

"The only one of its kind," said Felix, "and you got it."

"Huh? You've carried people before, haven't you?"

"Not like that, I haven't."

"Yeah? How come?"

Felix paused slightly, decided. "Too dangerous," he said.

There was silence while Ryan considered this.

"Thank you, Son," he mumbled through a thickening throat.

"Nada," whispered Felix.

Ryan's shrunken face was a ghastly contrast to the striped hospital pillow case. His darting eyes scanned the ceiling while Felix looked at a spot of the floor between his boots. At last the nurse left. The door hissed slowly shut before either nurse spoke.

"Promise me," whispered Ryan

hoarsely. "Promise me you'll give something a try. Something. Anything."

Felix frowned elaborately but his eyes were smiling.

"Please promise me," Ryan continued. "You're a young man with a fat planet beneath you. Cut yourself a slice."

Felix sighed, shifted his feet. "I'm not sure the world has anything to do with me. I'm losing touch, Ryan. Maybe I've already lost it."

"No! Fight that. The world is people, Son. The sky is empty. Fight it."

"Why?"

"Because you're a man, damnit. A man, born of woman."

"You sure of that?"

Please, Son. One more chance. Promise me."

Felix counted the checkered floor tiles underneath the hospital bed. Eighteen and a third.

"Please, Son," croaked Ryan, desperation in his voice.

Felix looked at him. "You can call me Felix, Old Man."

Ryan's eyes widened. His chin quivered. "Please, Felix," he added, almost inaudibly.

"Alright, Ryan. Alright. One more time."

Ryan smiled thinly through translucent lips. He patted Felix's hand awkwardly. Then he sighed, relaxing to it. He closed his eyes and lay quite still except for his lips, which soundlessly formed his friend's name, over and over again.

*May 4, Thursday. 12:00 AM—There's simply no way to do this right. I hate the make-up, but neither am I eager to kill another President.*

*Fortunately, the wharf lighting is poor and Chatham will have no reason to remember my face at first.*

*I still don't know what I should say to him. Perhaps "Take me to your leader." Oh well, here I go, Old Man.*

Chatham, the Chief Domestic Advisor, was right on time. He was also a pig. He came stumbling out through the casino doors onto the sidewalk wearing a custard yellow suit (side pockets bulging with chips)



and a black satin shirt open to the waist. He had a sort of medallion-thing around his neck that swung loosely amid great black tufts of chest hair. In his left hand was a half-finished martini. Felix, watching from the shadows of the wharf, sighed. He turned and looked down the length of the wharf. Chatham's lake yacht was the last one in line. He figured he would have about a hundred yards in which to make his play.

He shrugged and stepped out of the darkness with his palm extended. Felix began a mumbled introduction, but Chatham cut him off with a "Sure, Kid," while reaching into his jacket pocket for a gold fountain pen. Felix stared quizzically.

Chatham noted the look. "What's this?" he asked. "You want the autograph or not?"

Felix shook his head. "No, Sir. I wanted to see if you could..."

"Oh, I get it," snapped Chatham. "You want a handout. Typical. Well, forget it. I got no—repeat: no—spare change. Hit the road."

Felix didn't move, not believing this.

"Don't just stand there, Stupid," growled Chatham. "Get moving. Go peddle yourself somewhere else. I'm busy."

Felix started to say something about a misunderstanding, but Chatham cut him off, snorting loudly, and covering his ears with both hands.

"And don't whine about it, would you please? I can't stand it when you bums start bawling all over me."

"Mr. Chatham!" snapped Felix, "I don't think you know..."

"For God's sake, you little punk. Face it. You struck out. Now hit the road or I'll..."

"Shuddap!" Felix howled. "Listen to me. I don't want your autograph and I don't want your damned money."

Chatham grinned coldly in the darkness, unbelieving. Felix felt his cheeks redden, heard his voice rising childishly.

"Damn it, I'm here to speak with you about an urgent matter..."

"Oh please..."

"concerning national security!"

Chatham froze and stared at him. Then he exploded into helpless laughter. If possible, Felix's face flushed even more.

"Alright, I give," cried Chatham through

tears. "You're great. Here," he reached into a pants pocket, "here's a buck. You deserve it." He thrust the bill into Felix's hand and staggered away towards his boat, still laughing.

Felix stood there shaking, clutching the bill. He had never known such anger.

The yacht, filled with party-goers and their laughter, pulled away from the wharf and headed out across the lake. Then the engines were cut and it drifted. Inside, men and women rammed at one another with voices and bodies. Later, Chatham pulled a silk robe together around his belly and stepped out onto the stern with a cigar.

Felix was there, in flying black, waiting.

"Mr. Chatham..."

Chatham reeled back. He saw the black hood and thought of terrorists and torture. "Get away from me. I'll give you anything you want. I...I support your cause. Really."

Felix chuckled coldly in the darkness. "What cause is that?"

Chatham started to guess, thought better of it.

"I haven't come to hurt you, Chatham," Felix continued. "I'm here to offer you something. A bet."

"What kind of bet?"

"The best kind. The money kind. You interested?"

Eyeing the distance back inside to safety, Chatham nodded warily.

Felix nodded in turn. "Good. Now this is it: I bet you \$20,000 that I can do something that you don't think I can do. If I do it, you pay. If I don't, I pay. Deal?"

Right then, Chatham recognized the voice. "You're the damn punk from the wharf, aren't you? Oh, hell! Get out of here. What could you possibly do that could interest anybody for twenty grand?" He was furious, both at himself for having been so frightened, and at Felix, for having seen it. But all that flowed instantly from him when Felix answered:

"Fly."

There was something in the tone of that single word that made Chatham hesitate. He stared hard at Felix, but his voice was cautious.

"Anybody can fly, Kid. All you need is a ticket."

"I don't. I don't need a ticket or a plane or

a balloon or birds or anything else."

Chatham couldn't seem to break away from their mutual gaze. "Just you?" he managed at last.

"Just me," replied Felix calmly.

"No tricks or...hang gliders or...?"

"Just me."

"You're insane."

"Then take my money."

"You're crazy!"

"Getting scared, Fat Boy?"

Chatham was instantly enraged. Embarrassed, hating, and more than a little afraid, he screamed:

"Alright! Deal, you little punk! Show me! Let's see you fly!"

But Felix was already aloft. He hovered briefly above the gunwhale, spun, then soared off across the lake. Chatham, frozen statue-like, moaned softly.

Chatham, speaking incessantly, began lifting stacks of new bills from his overcoat pockets and arranging them on the sun table. It had taken all of his chips. Felix sat on the arm of a deck chair, wondering where all of his emotion had fled. It was a great effort, suddenly, to even follow Chatham's continual flow of words.

"Where was I?" demanded Chatham. "Oh, yeah. I'll have you in the White House by noon tomorrow. If I can just get two...that's right! You don't need a ticket, do you?"

Felix, thinking of the way the clouds formed over the cabin, shook his head.

"Anyway," Chatham continued, excitedly, "I'll get to the Man first. Set it up. Then you come in, I'll introduce you, and... Hey! You haven't told me your name yet!"

"No," said Felix firmly. "I haven't."

Chatham's eyes narrowed briefly. "Okay, then. Don't tell me. But you gotta tell the President."

"Do I?" asked Felix absently. He began stuffing bills into his belt.

"Course you do!" cried Chatham. "We gotta...Wait! Where are you going now? What about Washington? What about the Man? You can't just...You owe the nation to...Think what you could contribute! Damnitall, come back here!!!"

He told himself that he was only taking

time out to properly hone his skills. He told himself that he would return to Chatham the instant he reached his peak.

He flew constantly, over the mountains and deserts and twinkling cities. A year passed. He flew across Mexico and into South America. Another year.

He circumnavigated the globe—almost two years.

It was midnight. It was summer. He was in his hometown.

He walked slowly across the moon-lit fairways of a gently rolling golf course wondering what it was that he was feeling so strongly.

He could be of great value to them, to his country. Why didn't he just do it? But even with his money gone, he felt no desire to see Chatham, or anyone like him, ever again.

"Damnit," he said aloud, "why am I so lazy?"

He noticed idly that his walk had taken him to the clubhouse. There was a party, a huge dance, going on in the main ballroom. He stood by the pool, watching the lights flickering through the half-open curtains. The pool was a mirror. But the tiny waves caused the lights to make sudden garish leaps. Still wondering...

A woman's voice echoed hollowly across the tiles from nearby in the darkness. He spun about, startled, and saw her there in a plastic lounge, talking to herself and waving a drink. She was oblivious of him.

And she was Sally.

He stared, incredulous, unbelieving. But it was her.

He slipped his hood off. He stuffed it behind his belt. He approached her, called to her.

"Sally? It's me. It's Felix."

"Huh? Felix? Felix! Oh my God!!"

And then she was up and they were hugging and laughing all at once and she was telling him of all the great things she had done. And it was only then, when she had finished with herself and asked about him, that he saw the terrible terrible mistake he had made.

What, after all that she had obviously been through, could he tell her?

She was now running that same first-job company. She had married, incredibly, that same young executive from that same company last night. She had made a great success with him, her partner in ambition. She was alone.

It was horribly unfair, he thought, seeing her weary bitter eyes. After having the wisdom to make that awesome decision and the courage to go through with it...to still be lonely. He ached for her, for the pain she bore. He would not, he told himself, add to the cruelty. And he wouldn't have, had he but seen her anger rising.

"If you're not a member here, Felix, then what are you doing here in the middle of the night? Walking where? What time do you have to be at work in the morning? Well, what ARE you doing then? How do you make a living? How do you eat? Traveling where? You mean you just...You must be kidding!"

Sally could not help hating him. He was too easily, too casually, happy. Worse, there was no sign of the strain or of the Struggle. Without having lifted a finger, he dared to stand unashamedly before her and glow with well-being.

It wasn't that she wanted him to suffer, exactly, just to know all that he had missed. To know that he hadn't been living at all, damnit, just watching the world go by!

And when, seeing her anger rising, he said: "Sally, would it help to talk about it?" It was the last straw. Her rage, her humiliation, possessed her.

You bastard! How DARE you pity me!" "Sally, I wasn't. I was just..."

But she could not be reached. She spat her words at him, flinging tears and pain and mortal hatred.

"You were just being your usual insect self, Felix. You're pathetic. Tell me, Felix. Are you still waiting? Still waiting for your Big Move? Well, let me tell you, it'll never happen, Felix. And do you know why it'll never happen? Because you're a loser, Felix. And an insect. You always were."

Through a million clouds, ten million flights, from all the way around the world and back, her words crushed him still.

"...and you always will be a loser and an

insect. There's not a damn thing you can do to change it. You'll never be a part of anything. You'll never be involved, never contribute anything to anyone.

"So...so go away. Get away from me. I HAVE a life, damnit! I don't want an insect around me."

He could not move. He couldn't.

But she wouldn't stop.

"Go, damn you. Can't you hear me? Get out of my sight!" Her voice was almost unintelligible through her sobbing. But he heard her.

"Fly away, Insect," she said.

And, of course, he did.

He flashed directly away from her, zipping across the pool. Ten feet from the ballroom window, he drove through a one hundred eighty degree back flip and accelerated back toward her. Exactly toward her. Right at her, his eyes swelling toward her...

The sheer dynamics of his awesome approach seemed to drive his very being through hers. He closed the distance from one hundred feet to fifty, forty, twenty...His features swelling, growing, feeding...

At what seemed less than an arm's length away, he pulled up in a near-perfect ninety degree angle and, still accelerating, shot out of sight into the night summer sky.

For a long, long, time she stood there—head back, eyes wide and red, still as a statue. Afraid the mere act of breathing might shatter the crystalline scene, she managed to hold her breath a full minute and a half.

But it didn't work. He never returned.

Five hundred feet above her, silently hovering, Felix watched her tiny form give up at last and return to the party.

He was confused.

Why hadn't he gone? What was holding him here?

"Because," he said aloud, "that stunt was cheap. It was cruel. And...it was a lie, because Sally was right. I was waiting and not looking. And I really DIDN'T have faith in finding my spot.

"I really was too lazy to search for it..."

He saw himself then, as the shallow half-person she had accused him of being. He talked a good fight about eventual involvement and contributing and he promised Ryan easily enough but he had gone around the world instead. Just because he had been having fun.

Maybe it was time he faced up to the fact that...

He got it, then. At last, it was all there. He wasn't lazy. He was happy.

It was time to stop being ashamed of it.

He streaked off, up and away. Sally could go back to being another happy memory.

The gamblers, Ginelli and Roth, began by waving their hands underneath him. When that didn't work, they each took off their belts and buckled them together. Then they swung the leather up and over him rapidly, like it was some bizarre form of \$250,000 jump-rope. Only Felix wasn't jumping. He merely sat there, in thin air, and contemplated the distant lights of Las Vegas. At last, huffing and puffing, they gave up. Roth loosened his sweat-stained white collar and white silk tie and said: "Holy shit! He can really do it!" Ginelli, mopping his red face with a hankie, nodded miserably.

Stanley, the shill, laughed so hard he fell off of the rock he was using for a stool. "Those bastards," he thought, remembering all the trouble they had put him through to set this up. "They'll never call ME penny-ante again."

But the gamblers weren't thinking of that. They weren't even thinking about the enormous sum of money they had just lost. They were thinking about this incredible man who could fly.

No cynicism. No anger. No snide remarks or tough-guy talk.

Awe, instead. Awe.

He could fly!

As part of the deal, Felix gave them a brief ride above the nighttime desert. He would have flown them longer, knowing how much it meant to them, but Ginelli's excited gasping worried him a little. He wanted no more heart attacks. He put them back down in the clearing next to Stanley and began to gather the bills into

his black canvas bag. They stared while he did this.

He reminded them that each could ask one question—also part of the original deal. Ginelli asked the biggie.

"No," replied Felix gently, "I can't teach you..." He pointed to a commercial jet just taking off in the distance. "Could you catch him?"

Felix turned and regarded the receding lights. "Yes," he said.

"Wow," whispered Roth.

Felix smiled behind his black hood. "I would appreciate it, gentlemen, if you would keep this to yourselves. I have to make a living, you know."

Both gamblers loudly assured him that they would. Felix believed them. Why would dirty characters like these trade a greedy little secret for public scorn?

Felix bid them goodbye then, and turned to Stanley. The shill was smiling warmly at him with outright adoration. Felix smiled again. He had some idea of what Stanley had gone through, the humiliation and cruelty. More than just money could make up for. So he said: "Let's split, old Buddy!" and snatched Stanley into the air like a long-lost brother. Below them, the gamblers cringed with envy.

Stanley's ride back was as spectacular as Felix could make it, culminating with a breathtaking strafing run from one end of the Strip to the next. Felix lowered them gently to the balcony outside the penthouse Stanley had rented for the night (which he could normally never afford). He took out a wad of bills from his black baga took out a wad of bills from his black bag and handed it to the other man. Stanley's eyes widened as he counted it. It was three or four times more than he had been promised.

"Hey, this is enough for a couple more jobs at least. You want me to get some more guys?"

"No thanks," said Felix.

"Hey, I don't mind. Really. I'll throw it in. Scratch. Whenever you say."

Reluctantly, Felix told him about never using the same shill twice. Stanley's face fell, but he muttered quickly about understanding how a guy had to be careful.

And then he found that he couldn't stop

talking. He was jabbering away like crazy about nothing really but he just couldn't let this moment, this miracle, end. Felix seemed to listen, he saw. He was polite about it. But Stanley knew he wanted to be up there somewhere and knowing he was keeping him from it made Stanley feel worse than he ever wanted to feel.

So he shut up and let the Flyer say goodbye.

"Wait!" shouted Stanley, just as Felix was lifting. "Don't I get the one question?"

Felix laughed, alit. "Sure you do."

"Well, what I want to know is: What do you do with all the money?"

"Well, Stanley," replied Felix, his voice seeming warmer than it had ever been before, "what would you do if you were me?"

"Huh? If I was you? Well...Shit. I guess I'd pay the rent or maybe I'd get me a place that never had no rent, yeah! Someplace away and high! And then I'd fill it full of food and all and then I'd...Hell, I'd fly, is all.

Unless I just absolutely had to, I'd never set foot on the goddamn ground!"

Felix placed a hand fondly on his shoulder.

"I never do," he said and rocketed into the stars.

...only in your mind.

My flight is all. I fly and eat and fly and eat and when I have no food I bet and win. There is nothing beyond this.

Except no function. Assume no kinship. Do not pray. I am not a part. I am not involved. I do not contribute. I love you, but I do not owe you.

I only fly, hanging from my spine.....

### John Steakley

After a two-year screen writing career, Steakley turned to a career of science fiction writing. His first published story ("The Bluenose Limit", March, 1981 Amazing ) was rejected by 12 editors before finding its home and such recognition that his first novel, *Armor*, was accepted upon completion for representa-

tion by the Scott Meredith Literary Agency and is now in the process of being placed. Steakley exhibits a rich, unfettered imagination with a clean, spare and direct literary style. A new writer to watch with very special interest.—EM

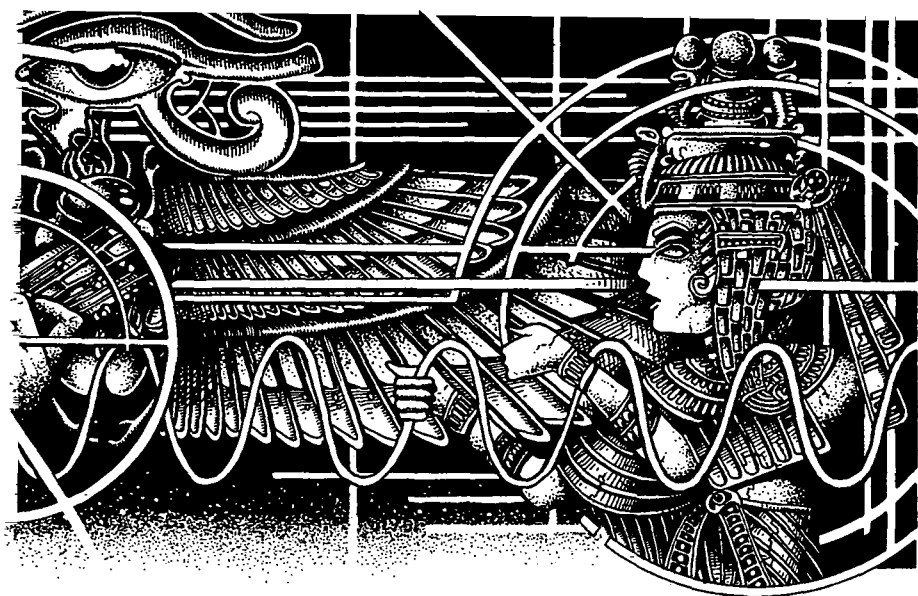
### METHODICAL MADNESS

Mentally bentially  
Albert's Einsteinian  
Views of the Universe  
On which he harped  
Ended up proving that,  
Relativistically,  
He wasn't crazy, the  
World was all warped!  
—John D. Seats



© brad w. foster 1982





# wally coins

---

## Geometry of the Blues

---

**S**tarboard Christopher, sitting in the clear underbelly of *Lucifer II*, sighed out loud and decided to give Old Larry's transmission from Earth another listen. Dark haired, blue suited Christopher regretted doing it. He would rather stay securely hovering above the blue-green planet, Earth, in his starship, but he figured he owed Larry at least one more listen. After all, Old Larry was serving as a Participant on this assignment, which allowed Starboard to be Observer. He would listen to Larry's last transmission one more time.

Starboard punched out Larry's code on the console and signalled the ship to repeat the latest transmission.

From the area currently known on Earth as Bolton, Mississippi, came Old Larry's message. It was even printed in the language then used by residents of the area from which it was sent, a quaint habit of the bearded man that made

**Illustration by Brad Foster**

**Geometry of the Blues 85**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Starboard think Larry was becoming too involved in his work as Observer.

Larry's message:

BEGINNING OF TRANSMISSION

*Honey, I need your love.*

*Darling, you know why.*

*If you would come back home.*

*There'd be no need for me to cry.*

END OF TRANSMISSION

Starboard Christopher put his face in his hands and shook his head.

"What in the name of all spheres does that mean?" he said out loud to himself.

He spoke in American, and he did so for a reason. He was warming up the tongue for daily use. He knew he would have to go down and see what Old Larry was up to.

Descending below the gravity blanket of the planet he was assigned was not something he liked to do. He went there as infrequently as possible. But now, just past the middle of the first half of what so many registered as the twentieth century, he would have to go down again.

"I was warned by Those of the council that it would be the twentieth on this planet that would force me to visit it the most," he thought to himself.

Sometimes entire centuries had passed with no necessity to descend, and that had been fine with him. He so preferred the role of Observer, riding the gleaming *Lucifer II* and monitoring the Earth life's quaint customs and habits.

"What on Earth does Larry have waiting for me this time?" he thought, preparing for his descent.

"Strum it a little when you slide your hand up its neck," Samuel told him.

"Like this?" asked Larry.

"That's it, sort of. You have to try and make that tickling sound."

Old Larry concentrated on the steel-bodied guitar on his lap. The black man watching him kept a straight face for a while, but soon cracked up laughing.

"Hell with it," said grizzled Larry, "I'll never figure it out."

"No, no, now come on," said Samuel, "you're getting it, you're getting it. It just takes a while. It don't come easy. You have to stick with it a little bit."

"But I'll never be able to play like you, Samuel."

"Well now, I've been at it a long time. It's not something I picked up over night. I didn't put my soul on the auction block to learn how to play like R.J. did."

"That's the man you told me about who sold his soul so he could play blues guitar?"

"That's right. That was him," Samuel answered and bent over the instrument. "One night he couldn't play at all and the next he was a wizard. Hell hound on his trail though."

Old Larry and Samuel sat in the small yard behind Samuel's home, a three-room shack that looked as if it might have once been a wood shed. It had windows Samuel had put in himself.

It was a warm night in Bolton. The black man coaxed the strings of his steel-bodied guitar. It waivered out a beautiful cry beneath the starry night.

When he finished he looked up at Larry and said, "But I can appreciate where you're coming from though. I know what it's like to want to be able to make

these strings talk and not be able to. It's frustrating."

"You don't seem too frustrated by it."

"That's because I got down on it for a long time, and now I know these blues. Other people are going to have to learn it soon too. White, black, pink or green—it don't matter. I can see there's hard times coming. Trouble down the road, and I mean way down the road too. So people better learn to sing their blues and play their blues, or they're going to wish they had, that's for sure."

Larry took a jolt out of the bottle he had brought to Samuel's house and the black man smiled. Samuel had a worn face that looked like it had seen a lot of road.

"Well," he asked Larry, "don't you have anything to say?"

"Not much. Sounds to me like you just said it all."

This cracked up Samuel all over the place.

"No, Larry, no. What you're supposed to do now is jump in with some of the things you got to say about the blues. You've seen us sitting around running things down just like they are. And instead here you are telling me I done said it all."

He laughed some more and Old Larry cackled along with him.

"Hey, I say what I believe," the bearded man argued, "just like you and everybody else that comes out here for a party."

"I know, I know. I'm just teasing you, I guess because you're white."

"What difference does the color of my skin make?"

"Makes no difference to me, man, you know that. But you also know it makes worlds of difference to most folks."

"Yes," said Larry, "I guess it does."

"But being as we are getting to be friends, I wonder if I could ask you a sort of personal question."

"Sure, go ahead."

"Well, Josh and I were talking the other day. He started asking me something about you, and, well, I didn't know the answer, but I was sort of wondering myself."

"So what the hell. Ask me then."

"O.k., o.k. Now it seems to me like you're a fairly smart man. And you ain't a weak man. And you're as white as can be."

"Yeah."

"So how come you live like you do. I mean, no offense meant, but it seems like you want to be shabby looking, like all you want to do is drift."

"Hmmm," Larry puzzled for a second.

What could he tell Samuel? How could he explain that he had been looking shabby since the twelfth century, that he found that was the best way to travel in his mission as Participant.

Instead he gave a slightly different version of it and finished with, "I've tried a lot of different things, done more than even you could probably guess. I've tried every side of the street, every kind of life. But I guess I just like drifting best. That old coat I carry around might look shabby, but it's warm and it's got big pockets. It'll hold everything I need."

Samuel chuckled and nodded his head, "Yeah, yeah."

"That's right," said Larry, "you know yourself what it is to drift. Remember that's how we met. We both talked about route 50, the way it comes out of the mountains in the Spring and there's wild roses everywhere. I'll always

remember the first time I saw it, and though I've seen things I can't even describe, still those hillsides of wild roses will always stay with me."

"That's right, that's right," said Samuel, "and I wrote this song called 'Wild Rose Blues.'"

He played the song, a pretty tune. Samuel played a skipping, easy blues style he had picked up around Memphis somewhere. At the end a female voice joined in harmony. Jackie was coming around the side of the house singing. They finished off together with a few chants and Samuel asked how she was.

Fine, fine, and they started talking. Jackie was a strong black woman with a beautiful, broad face.

"Has either of you seen Josh lately?" she wanted to know.

"No, not since yesterday."

"That man's been acting funny lately," Jackie said, "it seems he's never at his house."

"That's true," said Samuel. "We were over there yesterday and we didn't see him."

"He has an interesting house," said Larry.

"Interesting? Looks mostly like everybody else's house to me, said Jackie.

"Well, I mean it's an interesting location."

"What? Over by the river there? O.k., if you say so. But that doesn't tell me what's been eating him lately."

"Seems like it might be women trouble to me, Samuel offered.

"You got your nerve too, old man," she said, "bothering yourself about other people's business. Why don't you go take a vacation or something?"

"I'll take a vacation from your mouth."

"Oh, don't bother me now. Hey, listen to you two, you coming down to the bake tomorrow evening?"

"A bake tomorrow? Who's having it?" asked Samuel.

"It's over at Ory's."

"Over at Ory's. Yeah, I'll be there. How about you, Larry?"

"Sounds great to me. But uh, I was wondering...well, I was wondering something."

"What's that? Spit it out, man."

"Well, if he's a friend of yours, I guess that would be o.k."

"What color is he, Larry?" Jackie asked.

"That all depends on how he feels."

"Huh?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Samuel.

"Uh, what I mean is he likes to wear funny costumes sometimes, and I'm not sure that he won't have some kind of crazy get-up on. No telling what color it might be. Damn, I think I drank too much of this stuff."

After descending from the clear underbelly of the starship, *Lucifer II*, to meet Old Larry, Starboard Christopher had run into some problems. Nothing catastrophic, he had arrived o.k. in Bolton, Mississippi, U.S.A. But his molecule reassembler was not working properly. He buzzed in and out of view. He could not hold a disguise for long.

"You look a fine mess," Larry said to him as they sat in his little camp past the edge of town.

"I know," said Christopher, "it's because I'm coming down here too often. The ship's teleporter units are worn out."

He did look funny as he tried to project a shield of an overweight man in overalls. Little rainbow ripples shot through his stomach and once in a while an arm would wriggle off into space. The top and bottom of his face kept shifting back and forth like a wobbly trapezoid.

"Well, one thing's damn sure," said Larry, "you can't go to the bake like that. And you can't appear as Starboard Christopher either. Your features are just too handsome and your eyes look like blue rays on this planet."

Even as Larry spoke, Starboard assumed his usual ship shape. He was growing tired of wriggling around like a broken video receiver.

"Maybe I should just go back to the ship," he said. "I don't really like coming down. I'm an Observer, not a Participant like you with a shield that's second nature."

"You can't go back now. Didn't you receive my message?"

"Larry, I received it, but I haven't the slightest idea what it meant. Something about honey, love and crying."

"They were words from a song written around here that will eventually be recorded by Slim Harpo."

"Who?"

"Slim Harpo. He's a blues artist who will travel this region. Haven't you been spending any studies on the time charts?"

"Yes, but I spend most studies with the Nile delta versions of the songs."

"But they were centuries ago," said Larry, "and unfortunately no recordings of them that can be played on Earth exist."

"We can play them on *Lucifer II*. You know that it's an era's sounds that present the best picture of it. The sounds from Egypt are ravelled up in the pottery and weavings and such. The influence of that Nile River music became very big when Egypt started its sun worship. That was amazingly close to our first law of geometrics—the first law."

"I see, because the sun is a sphere," said Larry.

They both knew the law without saying it, discovered by one man in his time. "All which is a sphere turns round." The second and third laws also went through their heads, but they saw no need to speak them. It was enough to know that they were, on their home so far away, as here on Earth.

With the mention of ancient Egypt, it was inevitable that Starboard Christopher and Old Larry would fall into some discussion of pyramids, the geometry which dominated that civilization.

"But enough of that," Larry finally said, "let's get back to stars and stripes. How are you going to make an appearance at the bake this evening?"

"Larry, you haven't even told me *why* I'm going to make an appearance at the bake this evening."

Larry fell back to another description of the time scans. He could raise them right on Earth without the *Lucifer's* equipment, given enough time to do it. He showed Christopher the links he had found—Egypt, the U.S.A., Great Britain, the U.S.A. again, with strange spinoffs back to the mideast.

"It's worth a recording," said Larry, "and there's no better time and place than tonight's bake. Blues men and women from quite a few states are all passing through here right about now. You'll hear choruses that echo from Chicago to Memphis to New Orleans. But of course we both have to be there to record it just right. And if it is right, there's one house we should spread our geometry through. It belongs to a man named Josh and I think you'll want to see

it."

"But how can I go?" said Christopher. "You see my image shields have been ruined by the teleporter. And like you said, my eyes and face just won't pass."

The brightness of Christopher's blue eyes lit up the dark camp.

"Hmmm," said Larry, taking peanuts out of his ragged coat pocket and cracking them.

Chewing, cracking and chomping, he sat in the glow of Starboard's eyes.

"Hmmm," and he chewed away until finally he said, "I've got it."

"Good," said Christopher. "What?"

"Do you remember that festival we went to in feudal Japan?"

"Yes, that was fun, but..."

"You're image shields weren't working then either. Don't you remember, you wore a..."

"A mask," said Christopher.

"That's right. What's wrong with a good, old-fashioned mask?"

"It could work," said Christopher, "but where will we get it?"

"We'll make one. There's a great junkyard near here," Old Larry laughed. We'll dress you up to look like a spaceman. I've already set the stage for you to have a strange appearance at the bake."

The bake. The party. The hoedown. The wingding. The mess. The dance. The kick-me-up. The wang dang doodle. The celebration. The fry. All night long, all night long.

"This here's my friend," said Larry, "and his name is Sonny."

"What's that on his face?"

"That's kind of a mask he put together. He likes to dress up funny for parties, like in those movies about space."

Striping Starboard's face were strips of nylon cut from discarded stockings alternating with strips of thin metals. Dark glasses covered his eyes. The thing holding all this together was the beauty of the piece. A round, wide piece of metal with a hole in the middle covered Christopher's mouth.

Larry was the one who had spotted it in the dump.

"Nice, huh?" he said.

"It is a pretty, little round geometry," agreed Christopher. "I'll make it my mouthpiece."

To complete the costume, on Starboard's back was a funny looking tube pack, vaguely reminiscent of an air supply.

After Larry's introduction, Mance said, "Well. Mr. Spaceman Sonny, if you're a friend of Old Larry's, then come back here with the rest of us."

Mance was Ory's man, and since the party was in her backyard, Christopher followed him behind the house.

"Have a drink," someone said.

Christopher didn't know how, what with the mouthpiece. Larry tapped his shoulder and pointed to the thin, hollow cylinder he had put in Starboard's knee pad.

"Use the straw," he told Christopher.

"That's right, a straw, that's what he called the tube," thought Christopher and chuckled, "what an ingenious device, based upon the spiral.

The tube extended through the mouthpiece and Starboard Christopher, along with Larry, drank.

After a while, the baking was finished, the eating was through, and a lot of



talking and singing began. The jumping blues, the singing blues, the dancing blues, choruses, solos, guitars, wash tub basses, harmonicas. The party at Ory's was some bash.

Starboard Christopher got it all. Running around the inside of his round mouthpiece which Larry had found at the dump, and which now often had a straw sticking through it, was a tiny miracle of *Lucifer II's* technology, a miniature sound recorder.

"I'm sure that Those on the central council will want this," Larry whispered to Christopher.

"I'm not so sure. How does it pertain to the geometry of the situation?" the man in the mask asked.

"You'll see," said Larry.

The two companions soon became separated in the rapid movements of the party.

"Hey, Spacemen Sonny, step over here a minute. You want some of this?"

It was Mance speaking to Star Chris.

"Come over here now," he said.

Chris joined their group.

"You want some of this now?"

"Sure, sure."

"Say there Sonny. Me and Ory were talking, and we came up with a question we wanted to ask you."

"Go ahead and ask."

Normally Starboard felt uneasy in any social situation he encountered during his trips to Earth. But he had never been to a party like this before. That and the refreshments pouring into his system through his mouthpiece had him amazingly at ease.

"Now I hope you won't be offended or anything," said Mance, "but what we want to know is, why do you wear that costume?"

The striped, shiny head, dark eyes and round mouth turned levelly at Mance.

"What costume?" he said, and strolled away.

Ory and Mance cracked up all over the place.

Larry and Christopher together again fell into conversation with a guitar player called Walter V. The man had just finished a chorus ending with, "Honey, I need your love." Christopher recognized it immediately as the words of the transmission Larry had sent to *Lucifer II*.

Walter V. was also addressing his words to a pretty thing named Minnie standing nearby, and he was apparently feeling philosophical.

"Sure, I'm pretty good with a song," he said, "but what's it going to mean to anybody? I mean what difference does it make, one black man sitting out on the road near a swamp somewhere howling out his blues? How is that going to mean anything?"

Starboard, who was very smashed by this time, said, "Young men from England will be imitating you decades from now and the whole country will be hearing them over their radios. A few will still have round dials, but nearly all speakers will be round."

"Huh, England? What you talking about? You making fun of me?"

"Pay no attention to him," said Larry. "He's one of the new breed, a science

fiction fan. You know, he reads all those small magazines."

"Oh? Well he sure talks funny."

"What do you expect?" said Minnie. "He don't look normal. Why should he talk normal?"

"You got a point there."

Pretty soon talk got around to Samuel's friend, Josh. Where was he? No one had seen him for a few days. Jackie looked uneasy as everyone spoke. She was sitting very close to a man named Scrapper, a very fine guitar player, and she seemed to be avoiding the conversation about Josh.

"I understand he was having some woman trouble."

"Who? Josh?"

"Yes, that's what I understand. He was having some woman trouble."

"That's easy enough to solve. A forty-four smokeless will usually take care of that."

"A smokeless? That's no way to solve problems. I don't approve of those kinds of goings on, not one bit."

"But that Josh, he has a hot head. He might not think like you."

This was correct information. Josh had a tendency to lose his head in a tight situation. Larry was telling this information to Starboard Christopher.

"And if he starts to drinking, Samuel says to watch out," Larry said.

"You mean this party is expecting a little company?" the space man asked.

Larry nodded yes and said, "So how are the tapes going?"

"Everything seems fine. I'm sure I have the last three songs."

"Did you get 'Honey, I need your love'?"

"Yes."

"Damn good. I believe They will be very happy with this. Do you have the lightsound divider measures?"

"What do you think is in this silly looking pack on my back?"

"Damn good. Be ready for action soon. It's at Josh's house that we have to take the damn readings."

"It makes me think you enjoy being down here the way you stick so close to the vernacular."

"Damn right. And just like Samuel said, here comes Josh."

"Will that beautiful woman named Jackie scream?" asked Starboard.

"I think so."

Jackie screamed, and right away she was center stage. Standing in front of her was Josh, and the pistol in his hand looked shiny and deadly.

Scrapper held out his palms and said, "Now look here, I don't want no trouble."

"You got it, sucker," said Josh.

"Josh, I just knew you were going to pull something like this," Samuel spoke up and made his way to the front of the crowd. "I just knew it. But I also know you won't go through with it. Come on, Josh, you don't have it in your heart to go around shooting folks, do you?"

"My heart? My heart's been thrown in the trash by this woman, and I got it in my brain to shoot someone because of it."

"I made no promises to you," Jackie said. "I made no promises to you, Josh, and you have no right to run my life."

"Promises are one thing, woman, but you messing around in my very house with Scrapper here is another."

Jackie and Scrapper protested.

"What are you talking about? We're just sitting here talking."

"And we didn't do no messing in anybody's house, let alone yours. You crazy?"

"Don't be telling me those lies," said Josh, "when there's proof. I seen proof in my house and it's there right now."

"Then let's go over and see this proof."

"You bet we're going there. We're marching over there right now."

Josh flicked the gun and gestured for Jackie and young Scrapper to move out the door. The trio left and quite a bit of the party went along with them, still drinking, smoking, laughing, talking.

"That's just great," Starboard said to Larry, "right at the time we do our measuring. Look up and see where the stars are. There's what they call Arcturus, and we have to start measuring. It's going to be hard enough to do anyway, after all the alcohol I've consumed. How are we ever going to do it with a crowd around?"

"We'll do it, we'll do it," said Larry, "somehow, Samuel will help us."

"You told him?"

"I told him enough. I think he'll help."

"Now look there," Josh was screaming, "look there what I found in my house leaning on my front door. You know whose guitar that is. That's Scrapper's. And look there hanging on it. You see whose pretty slip that is hanging on the guitar. That's Jackie's, that's who. Now what's anybody going to tell me? I got this gun and what's anybody going to tell me?"

"Look there!" Mance suddenly yelled from the crowd. "Look there! What is that Spacemen Sonny has? What's he doing?"

Starboard was unfolding some sort of stand from what was supposed to look like his air pack. The thing unfolded into myriads of trapezoidal and pyramidal shapes formed by glass rods. Finally they stretched into the overall shape of a cone about two meters high. On top of this Christopher was fastening a silver sphere which looked like one quarter of it had been sliced off and a silver half-saucer stuck in it. From the rim of the saucer three black tubes projected.

Larry was standing in front of it.

"Josh," Old Larry spoke up, his hands deep in his pockets, staring at the ground in front of him, "Josh, Jackie, Scrapper, I owe all of you an apology. I'm the cause of this problem, and I feel real bad about it."

Everyone stood still, waiting for an explanation.

"I put Scrapper's guitar and Jackie's slip in your house."

"What'd you do that for?" said Josh. "You mixed up with Jackie too?"

"No, no, nothing like that. I'm sorry it had to be your house. But the nexus showed the only possible location, and the lines stretch almost all the way from Cairo, then clear out to England."

"What kind of gobbledygook you talking, Larry? I want to know what you're doing dragging my old lady's slip around town?"

"And my guitar," added Scrapper. "That thing's had me worried, been missing for a while now."

"He couldn't help it," said Starboard, from behind the metal ring around his mouth. "These time-lightsound things need material concretes to operate on. That guitar has strings and shells on its back from Egypt. And Jackie's

undergarment comes from France. You have excellent taste, Josh. France is a country just across the water from Eng..."

"Just stow it and set that thing up," Old Larry told him. "These people know where France is. And stop falling into your polite gentleman routine. Is that the only shield you know?"

"Enough of this stuff. You shut up, Spaceman Sonny. And you, Larry, I'm still wondering why you put Scrapper's guitar in my house. I never could play any instrument a lick anyway."

But Larry was so busy with Christopher, twisting the silver thing on top of the glass cone, that he didn't have time to answer. Samuel stepped in instead.

"Now look, Josh," he said, "and Scrapper, you listen to me too. Larry's told me about this and there's no reason for you to be alarmed. It doesn't matter that it's in your house. It's not whose the house is, but where the house is. That's what's important."

"It's where the house is, not whose the house is?" Josh asked, but he was staring at the silver thing.

A thin, red beam was coming out of one of its tubes. It glowed like a hot, red snake until a yellow string seemed to shoot out of it. The yellow line shot off into the distance, but seemed to fade as it moved away.

"Samuel, Samuel," said Josh, "what are they doing?"

"From what I can put together," he answered, "it's sort of like they're surveying, but their lines go half way around the Earth."

"But that one's going through my house!"

"Yeah, it is, but don't worry. It won't harm anything."

The red glow in front of the tube glowed even brighter, then emitted a low hum just before a purple ray suddenly shot out from another tube extending from the silver sphere.

"Uh oh," said Larry.

"What is it?" asked Christopher. "I thought the reading was going pretty well."

"It's going fine, but look who's coming down the walk. Something else Samuel warned me about."

It was just a man and his dog. Or rather a man and the state's dog. Make that dogs. And make that man the sheriff. They were coming to break up the party, but the party was already scattering. The sheriff had other men with him, and some carried shotguns.

"One's got a gun," said the deputy with the shotgun to the sheriff.

"You with that gun! Stop where you are! You're under arrest!"

No one stopped. Everyone scattered. Except Larry and Christopher could not scatter, they were busy trying to complete their readings.

Shotgun pellets sailed over their heads.

"Why are things always so strange when you come down here?" Larry asked his partner.

"You mean it's me," he said from behind his mask. "I always thought it was this blasted planet. Well, run that sound tape on the light beam one this time and we'll be through."

So the tape sounded and the blues played. They sang through the warm Mississippi night as the state police fired their guns and the local party scattered and hid. Starboard's lines stretched from Africa to the Mississippi to Europe. In the underbelly of *Lucifer II*, three clicks sounded in a console and the gleaming

geometry rippled the ancient machinery of flight.

Larry and Christopher hurried to finish.

*Honey, I need you love.*

*Darling, you know why.*

*If you would come back home,*

*There'd be no need....*

"Put your hands in the air. Freeze where you are and put your hands in the air."

Larry and Starboard were the only two left to freeze, and they didn't.

"Looks like we're finished here," said Christopher,

"Yes, but we'll need a shield," said Larry.

"Jesus, one of them's a white guy," was the last coherent comment the two space travellers heard from the approaching group of men.

Christopher hit a tiny button even as he spun the sphere around on top of the cone-like stand. In front of the approaching posse loomed a trio of painted savages. They shook spears, brandished clubs, had long fangs for teeth and stood nearly fifteen feet high. The cries and shouts of the posse as they retreated down the road were anything but coherent.

But in a few minutes the savage images dissolved into the molecules of air from which they were constructed. The spinning silver sphere atop the cone made from glass rods turned to powdery ash, soon blown apart by the cool breeze from the river.

Starboard Christopher and Old Larry were gone.

They were back at Larry's hidden camp.

"This has been a hell of a century down here so far," said Larry.

"And it's not over yet," Christopher reminded him.

"But it's not all numbers and it's not all bad. Aren't the people basically the same?"

"Maybe."

Come on now," said Larry, "even you have to admit the picture has just that touch of a deep, rich aesthetic tone."

Christopher flipped a receiver button under his belt and they heard Samuel's voice from fairly far away.

"Yeah, it was an o.k. night. They didn't get a one of us tonight. No, not a one," Samuel said.

"But when it comes to your buddies," they heard Walter V.'s voice, "I don't really want to talk about it except there's one thing I have to say. I got a sneaking feeling that those two were for real."

Out in a green piece of meadow, Larry and Christopher caught another image on their receiver. It was Josh and Jackie making sweet love with just the moon and stars overhead. Further in the distance, even without the receiver, they could hear the tinkling of Scrapper's guitar.

"Yes," said Christopher, "I'll admit it. It's still warm, it's human here."

Christopher switched off his receiver and they were both silent for a spell. Just the sound of a few frogs and Scrapper's guitar could be heard.

Starboard finally said, "Well, I've done my work. I'm heading up. How about

Starboard finally said, "Well, I've done my work. I'm heading up. How about yourself?"

"I was thinking of either route fifty where that hill of wild roses is, or New Orleans."

"New Orleans would be easier," said Starboard.

"Then make it New Orleans."

"O.k., but I'm not coming down again. At least not until Pearl Harbor anyway."

"Damn right," said Larry.

In as much time as it took to think about it, Starboard was nearing being back on board his craft. Larry leaned against a wrought iron gate somewhere near the Gulf. Josh never could handle a guitar nor sing, but he did fairly good with beautiful Jackie. Scrapper made some recordings.

Samuel spent some evenings wondering how the white guitar playing groups from England and the States would sound. His fingers skipped over the lines of his guitar strings. His heart sounded good thumping in his chest. ●

---

### **Wally Coins** **(Carl Waluconis)**

*Wally Coins began hitch-hiking across the continent to San Francisco in the folk ages of the early 60s. He grew up in a blues harbor town and still lives near the water. He has had many jobs: gardening, factory work, construction and college instruction. Now he sells books and comics from his own store in the Pacific northwest.*

*He is married and has one child. He first appeared in Amazing in January of 1981 with "Pearl Harbor Parallax", a precursor to "Geometry of the Blues" in this issue. He has had one novel, Whispers of Heavenly Death published (1980, Manor Books) and now has another ready to go.*

### **DIRT UNDER HIS NAILS**

His cells reconstituted,  
voice a level deeper,  
they brought him back  
200 years after  
to play the Prince Albert Hall.  
All the neo-rockers shrilled  
over his delicious drabness  
although his music wasn't their kind.  
Above the electrohorns' wail,  
above the thrumming nuclear drums,  
came his voice, all dirty  
and somehow full of blood.  
His antiseptic fans escaped  
in a spilling, their cheek-stars dripping,  
afraid of the ghetto dogs, the backstreet  
stompings - the galactic teens  
leery of the dirt  
under his nails, the ragged throat  
in his song.

**—Steve Rasnic Tem**



# RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY

The critical magazine of science-fiction and fantasy

## IN RECENT AND FUTURE ISSUES

Lloyd Biggle, "Science Fiction Goes to College."

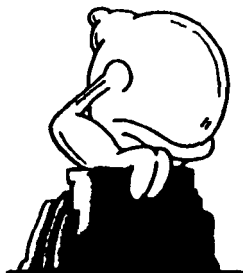
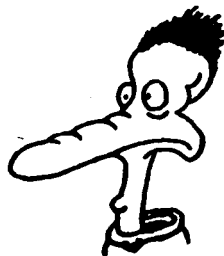
S. C. Fredericks, "Philip Jose Farmer and the White Goddess."

R. A. Lafferty, "No Stone Unthrown."

Bernd Rulikotter, "On Soviet Readers and Fans of Science-Fiction."

Karen Schuldner, "Notes on Dhalgren and Triton."

James Wade, "On Being Scared Out of One's Knickers: Carl Claudy's Kane-Dolliver Juveniles."



Plus columns, reviews, articles by Peter Bernhardt, Bill Blackbeard, Jim Harmon, Harry Warner, Joe Christopher, Doug Barbour, Alexei Panshin, etc.

Plus letters and poetry by Poul Anderson, Bob Bloch, Tom Clareson, Samuel Delany, Tom Disch, Joyce Carol Oates, Joanna Russ, Sheryl Smith, etc.

Plus art by Derek Carter, Grant Canfield, Vincent diFate, Mary Emerson, Phil Hawkins, Pat Hodgell, Mark Schirmeister, Steven Utley, etc.

Subscriptions \$5 (four issues) from:

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY  
P. O. Box 1763  
Hartsville, S. C. 29550

Four out the 24 back issues are now available—#4, 22, 23, and 24—with the others being scheduled for re-printing (the next being #11 and #12). All sell for \$1.25 each.

Special offer: A \$10 order entitles you to a free copy of H. P. Lovecraft: A Symposium, with Bob Bloch, Arthur Cox, Fritz Leiber, and Sam Russell. To our knowledge, this symposium is not available elsewhere at any price.

# The Amazing Hall of Fame

---

*The Hall of Fame allows today's noted writers and our readers to indulge in a nostalgic look at stories from Amazing's Golden Past.*

## Introduction to "Beside Still Waters"

In 1952, the time I wrote "Beside Still Waters," I lived in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, with my first wife and first child. I had just begun free-lancing full-time; I'd even given up my position at Wright Aeronautical, where I x-rayed jet engine parts on the graveyard shift and discussed symbolic logic and psychic archeology with the other misfits. As a writer, I felt that I deserved an office, and so I rented a room in a dentist's suite in nearby Fort Lee. The dentist would come in and talk to me when business was slow, which was most of the time. Although he was a great believer in hypnotism, his patients insisted on novocaine. We discussed this and many other matters, and for some quiet I would

go for long walks on the George Washington Bridge. Fort Lee was a pleasant old town then, not at all like today's steel and glass monstrosity. Biograph Studios, where the first talking pictures in America were made, was still standing on Main Street. It burned down years later; now there is a pizza parlor to mark the spot.

In this heady intellectual atmosphere, ideas were always crackling. "Beside Still Waters" came to me one stormy day, and, typically, I did nothing about it. When it came around for the second time, I sat down and wrote it. The rest is publishing history.

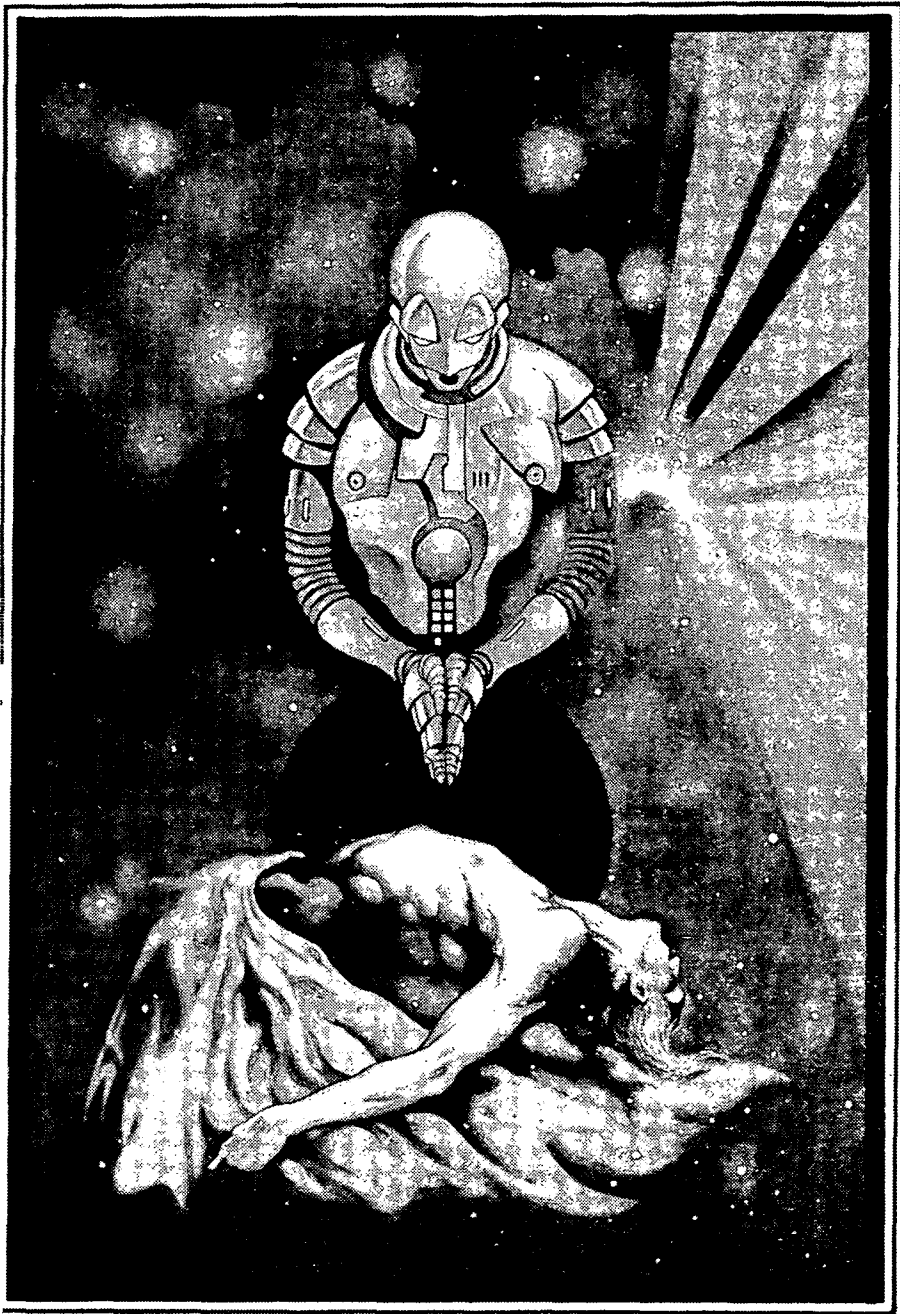
—Robert Sheckley

# Robert Sheckley

---

# Beside Still Waters

---



**Illustration by Stephen Fabian**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**M**ark Rogers was a prospector, and he went to the asteroid belt looking for radioactives and rare metals. He searched for years, never finding much, hopping from fragment to fragment. After a time he settled on a slab of rock half a mile thick.

Rogers had been born old, and he didn't age much past a point. His face was white with the pallor of space, and his hands shook a little. He called his slab of rock Martha, after no girl he had ever known.

He made a little strike, enough to equip Martha with an air pump and a shack, a few tons of dirt and some water tanks, and a robot. Then he settled back and watched the stars.

The robot he bought was a standard model all-around worker, with built-in memory and a thirty-word vocabulary. Mark added to that, bit by bit. He was something of a tinkerer, and he enjoyed adapting his environment to himself.

At first, all the robot could say was "Yes sir," and "No sir." He could state simple problems: "The air pump is laboring, sir." "The corn is budding, sir." He could perform a satisfactory greeting: "Good morning, sir."

Mark changed that. He eliminated the "sirs" from the robot's vocabulary; equality was the rule on Mark's hunk of rock. Then he dubbed the robot Charles, after the father he had never known.

As the years passed, the air pump began to labor a little as it converted the oxygen in the planetoid's rock into a breathable atmosphere. The air seeped into space, and the pump worked a little harder, supplying more.

The crops continued to grow on the tamed black dirt of the planetoid. Looking up, Mark could see the sheer blackness of the river of space, the floating points of the stars. Around him, under him, overhead, masses of rock drifted, and sometimes the starlight glinted from their black sides. Occasionally, Mark caught a glimpse of Mars or Jupiter. Once he thought he saw Earth.

Mark began to tape new responses into Charles. He added simple responses to cue words. When he said, "How does it look?" Charles would answer, "Oh, pretty good, I guess."

At first the answers were what Mark had been answering himself, in the long dialogue held over the years. But, slowly, he began to build a new personality into Charles.

Mark had always been suspicious and scornful of women. But for some reason he didn't tape the same suspicion into Charles. Charles' outlook was quite different.

"What do you think of girls?" Mark would ask, sitting on a packing case outside the shack, after the chores were done.

"Oh, I don't know. You have to find the right one." The robot would reply dutifully, repeating what had been put on its tape:

"I never saw a good one yet," Mark would say.

"Well, that's not fair. Perhaps you didn't look long enough. There's a girl in the world for every man."

"You're a romantic!" Mark would say scornfully. The robot would pause—a built-in pause—and chuckle a carefully constructed chuckle.

"I dreamed of a girl named Martha once," Charles would say. "Maybe if I'd looked, I would have found her."

And then it would be bedtime. Or perhaps Mark would want more conversation. "What do you think of girls?" he would ask again, and the

discussion would follow its same course.

Charles grew old. His limbs lost their flexibility, and some of his wiring started to corrode. Mark would spend hours keeping the robot in repair.

"You're getting rusty," he would cackle.

"You're not so young yourself," Charles would reply. He had an answer for almost everything. Nothing elaborate, but an answer.

It was always night on Martha, but Mark broke up his time into mornings, afternoons and evenings. Their life followed a simple routine. Breakfast, from vegetables and Mark's canned store. Then the robot would work in the fields, and the plants grew used to his touch. Mark would repair the pump, check the water supply, and straighten up the immaculate shack. Lunch, and the robot's chores were usually finished.

The two would sit on the packing case and watch the stars. They would talk until supper, and sometimes late into the endless night.

In time, Mark built more complicated conversations into Charles. He couldn't give the robot free choice, of course, but he managed a pretty good simulation of it. Slowly, Charles' personality emerged. But it was strikingly different from Mark's.

Where Mark was querulous, Charles was calm. Mark was sardonic, Charles was naive. Mark was a cynic, Charles was an idealist. Mark was often sad; Charles was forever content.

And in time, Mark forgot he had built the answers into Charles. He accepted the robot as a friend, of about his own age. A friend of long years standing.

"The thing I don't understand," Mark would say, "is why a man like you wants to live here. I mean, it's all right for me. No one cares about me, and I never gave much of a damn about anyone. But why you?"

"Here I have a whole world," Charles would reply, "where on Earth I had to share with billions. I have the stars, bigger and brighter than on Earth. I have all around me, close, like still waters. And I have you, Mark."

"Now, don't go getting sentimental on me—"

"I'm not. Friendship counts. Love was lost long ago, Mark. The love of a girl named Martha, whom neither of us ever met. And that's a pity. But friendship remains, and the eternal night."

"You're a bloody poet," Mark would say, half admiringly.

"A poor poet."

Time passed unnoticed by the stars, and the air pump hissed and clanked and leaked. Mark was fixing it constantly, but the air of Martha became increasingly rare. Although Charles labored in the fields, the crops, deprived of sufficient air, died.

Mark was tired now, and barely able to crawl around, even without the grip of gravity. He stayed in his bunk most of the time. Charles fed him as best he could, moving on rusty, creaky limbs.

"What do you think of girls?"

"You have to find the right one."

"I never saw a good one yet."

"Well, that's not fair."

Mark was too tired to see the end coming, and Charles wasn't interested. But the end was on its way. The air pump threatened to give out momentarily.

There hadn't been any food for days.

"But why you?"

"Here I have a whole world—"

"Don't get sentimental—"

"And love of a girl named Martha."

From his bunk Mark saw the stars for the last time. Big, bigger than ever, endlessly floating in the still waters of space.

"The stars..." Mark said.

"Yes?"

"The sun?"

"Lost long ago—the eternal night."

"A bloody poet."

"A poor poet."

"And girls?"

"I dreamed of a girl named Martha once. Maybe if—"

"What do you think of girls? And stars? And Earth?" And it was bedtime, this time forever.

Charles stood beside the body of his friend. He felt for a pulse once, and allowed the withered hand to fall. He walked to a corner of the shack and turned off the tired air pump.

The tape that Mark had prepared had a few cracked inches left to run. "I hope he finds his Martha," the robot croaked.

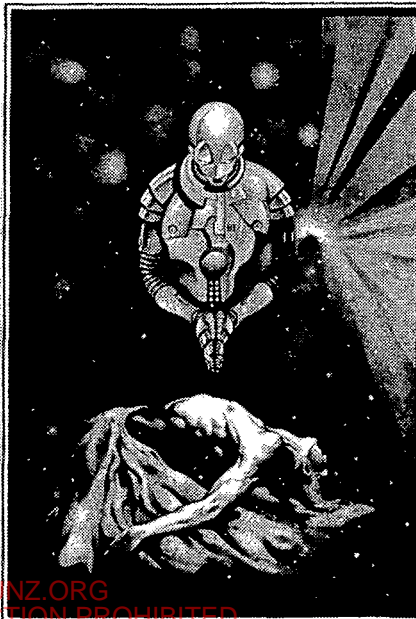
Then the tape broke.

His rusted limbs would not bend, and he stood frozen, staring back at the naked stars. Then he bowed his head.

"The Lord is my shepherd," Charles said. "I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me..."

### Robert Sheckley

*Sheckley's first published story was in 1952 and he has been producing a special brand of superlatively witty short stories parodying the world's all-too-human problems up through the 60s and early 70s. He has written some novels, but is chiefly known in the field for his short story collections. He served as fiction editor for Omni magazine during 1979-81, and has now returned to writing again as he investigates a nomadic, outdoor lifestyle.—EM*





# Alan Ryan GESTURES

---

**T**hey'd just as soon kill you as look at you," the older man said. "Be careful. Stay behind that shield."

Trooper David DeVries stepped quickly to his left and made certain his entire body was protected by the plastiglass shield that lined the inside of the platform. It would have been safer, he thought, to stay away from the plastiglass altogether, stay back near the rear wall of the platform, but from there you couldn't see the compound and the Melanians who sometimes moved, silently and stealthily, among the trees and rocks inside it. And watching the Melanians was the point of the assignment. DeVries had drawn it for the first time today; that meant he would be up here on this narrow platform—it seemed to be getting narrower by the second—every day for the next month. He wasn't looking forward to it. He had heard stories from some of the others who had done their tours of duty on the Wall. He glanced sideways at the captain. Well, if he had to serve this duty for a month, at least he had an old pro to tell him how to handle it. Captain Harding looked like a man who had survived a lot already and who was strong enough, and clever enough, to survive a lot more.

"You move around a lot," Harding was saying. "In fact, you keep moving. It's a good policy. That way you won't find yourself getting stiff and tired. You'll be more alert, too. Less chance of missing something that way."

"Yes, sir," DeVries said.

The captain leaned his left shoulder against the plastiglass and folded his arms across his chest. His face was burned a dark reddish brown by the sun of Malania. Wrinkles creased the skin around his eyes.

"You hate it, don't you?" he said.

DeVries hesitated, trying to judge the older man's meaning. Better be honest, he thought.

"Well, I don't much like it," he said.

Harding grinned—although DeVries thought there was little humor in it—and the grin creased his face into a million wrinkles.

"Nobody likes it," he said. His voice sounded slightly more gentle. "I don't like it, either. But you do what you have to do. You'll get used to it." Then his manner changed abruptly. He became brusque, efficient, the superior officer rather than the friendly comrade, the fellow sufferer.

"You have a lot to learn," he said, "even though it may look as if there's nothing to do. If you stay alert, you'll have eyes like a hawk in less than a week's time, be able to spot the slightest movement. But for now, I want you to learn the basics. And learn them well." He turned to look out over the dusty compound, his hands gripping the railing at the bottom of the plastiglass.

"You have your mess kit, right? Right. It's a nine-hour tour. It'll seem longer till you get used to it and learn to see everything that's going on out there. Our stretch of the Wall is marked off so you can't miss the ends of it in either direction. Walk the whole length of it. You'll find that you're working out your own routine, but

don't take your eyes off the compound for more than a few seconds at a time. Those little gray bastards can move fast when they want to. And don't take anything at face value, not even a tree or rock, at least until you've been on the Wall long enough to know that those things are a tree and a rock."

DeVries had turned back to the plastiglass shield and was letting his eyes roam over the uneven surfaces of the compound. That was what they called it—"the compound"—and that was how even official documents referred to it. But DeVries knew that it wasn't really a compound. To his left and right the Wall, topped by its platform and gleaming panels, stretched out in a more or less straight line to the horizon. The top of the Wall and the platform remained level, ignoring irregularities in the ground. The Wall was a construction marvel necessitated by the primitive conditions of Melania. And among those were the primitive Melanians, who had not taken kindly to the coming of strangers (especially strangers whose coming was itself beyond their comprehension), and whose social customs—in particular, the semi-annual Killing of Children, as the Terrans had named it—were repulsive to a civilized culture. So the Wall was built, stretched all the way across this continent, and on one side of it the Terrans stripped the land of its ores, and on the other side of it the primitive Melanians scratched a dusty existence from the dry soil and the occasional patches of forest. And hunted and killed their male children—semi-annually—out of sight of civilized eyes.

"Do they come near the Wall very often?" DeVries asked. He had yet to see a Melanian in the flesh.

"Sometimes," the captain said. "Sometimes they'll walk right up near the Wall and stare at you openly. Other times they're squirming around on their bellies in the dust. And sometimes they'll just go about their business, whatever the hell it is, right in front of you, like you weren't there at all. Just watch them. Be suspicious and try to figure out what they're up to. If you can't, if something looks really fishy to you, use the communicator—there's one every

hundred meters along the platform—and give the base a call. If they think it's necessary, they'll make a quick flyover and take a look themselves from up close. Now don't be too quick to call in every few minutes, of course. Fuel and time are expensive. But if you see something you can't explain nohow, call."

"I take it you don't call the base very often," DeVries said.

He thought the captain sighed before speaking. "No, not very often. But they're there if you need them. You'll have to use your own judgement. Listen, son, just remember two things. First, be suspicious. Second, fuel is expensive."

DeVries stared through the plastiglass. In the compound, nothing moved. The two men were silent for a minute. Then, without looking at the captain, DeVries spoke quietly.

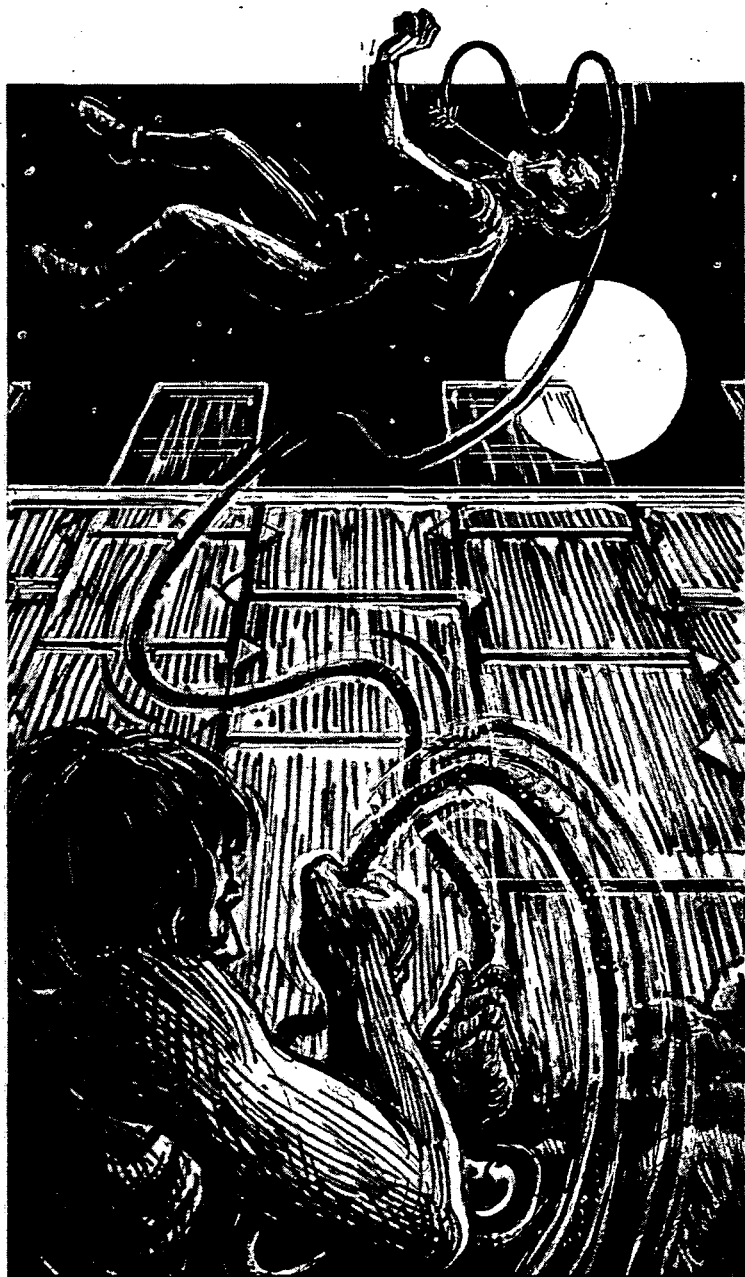
"They're humanoid, aren't they?" he said.

"If you can call it that," the captain answered.

Donat put down the barbed arrowhead he had been scraping on a rock. He leaned forward and, grimacing, rubbed his aching ankle with grimy fingers. He had done a great deal of walking today, searching for the best stones, chips of rock, and straight, tough branches. Good weapons required the best materials. If you wanted to stay alive later, you did the necessary work now. But all the walking and crouching, most of it on uneven ground, had made the ankle swell. It ached dully and Donat kept kneading it with his fingers until the pain receded somewhat. You needed sturdy legs and strong ankles too, if you intended to survive. That ankle had almost cost him his life last time. He didn't intend to let the same thing happen again. He hadn't lived almost thirteen years—and survived three Savings—and learned nothing.

Except for his ankle, his young body was powerful, ridged with taut tendons and firm muscles. His dark eyes, as they watched his hands work steadily on his ankle, were serious, alert, lively.

He ran his fingertips over the ankle to feel for the swelling. He thought it had



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gone down a little. Satisfied for the moment, he stood, using his left leg, the better one, to lever himself up. Carefully, he placed the right foot on the ground and gradually shifted his weight. The ankle held. It was still sore but the pain that had bothered him all day was gone. He would have to walk the stiffness out of it. He wasn't about to lose his life because of a sore ankle.

His eyes scanned the ground. It was littered with the tools and materials for making weapons. The stone for sharpening edges lay at his feet. Beside it were the arrowheads, some only chipped into a rough shape so far, others sharpened, finished, ready for use. Beside them lay the rough odd shape of the crossbow. And beside the crossbow lay the white string that would bring it to life.

Donat picked it up and stretched it, snapped it taut, then ran it slowly between his fingers, examining it for flaws, cuts, tears, tiny imperfections that could make it fail just at the instant when the whole plan might depend on it. There were none. He coiled it and dropped it into the leather pouch that hung at his waist.

Then he picked up the oddly shaped arrowhead and turned it over slowly in his hands. It was four-sided, the outer edges rising to a needle-sharp point. Each of the edges swept back the length of Donat's longest finger and curved sharply into a vicious barb. He tested each of the four edges against his thumb. He thought they would do.

Handling everything with care, he gathered up the arrowheads and other implements and bundled them into the leather sack he had brought. Then he turned and walked rapidly back toward the gathering of dusty huts. He was careful not to favor the sore ankle—it would not favor him when the time came, nine days hence, to depend on it—but there was no way he could avoid the limp he had lived with now for almost six months.

The hut smelled of food, sweat, animals, which to Donat meant it smelled of life. He inhaled deeply of the rich aroma. Moving quickly, he stepped across the open space at the center and stowed the leather sack among his own few belongings piled neatly beside his sleeping palette. Then he

stretched out on the palette and closed his eyes. The warm smells surrounded him, a thick cloud of aromas that meant he was alive and safe. His hand crept out to touch the leather sack. The things it held would help insure that he stayed alive. Nine days, he thought, until the next Saving. I'll be ready. With that thought in his mind, he allowed himself to drift into a light sleep.

He came instantly awake a few minutes later when his brother pushed aside the doorflap and entered the hut. Donat lay with his eyes open, his body unmoving, while Barra did the same as he had done, carefully putting away his own leather sack of tools and weapons. Barra was a year younger than Donat, but his body was built on the same lines and his eyes were just as sharp.

They owed each other their lives and Donat knew that his own debt was the greater. In the last Saving, with six days left before it was over, Donat had stepped onto a rock that had looked to be half buried. But as soon as his foot came down on it, the rock rolled over. Donat fell sprawling on his face, only long habit keeping him from crying out as rough gravel drew blood from knees and chin. Arrows of pain shot through his ankle. Barra, seeing his brother fall, blanched with fear. He was afraid to risk his life alone against the Elders; he needed Donat for his own survival.

They waited as long as they could, there on the hillside. Donat lay on the ground where he had fallen, trying desperately with trembling fingers to ease the terrible burning in his ankle, trying to make it work so it would support him. His face contorted in pain each time he moved it. Barra, following Donat's instructions, crept back to the top to the stony hill and kept watch for the Elders. When he spotted them across a dry rift, he came sliding back to where Donat lay, stared at his brother's ankle, now swollen twice its usual size, then looked quickly back toward the hilltop that would protect them from sight for only a little while longer. You'll have to carry-me, Donat told him.

And Barra, a year younger and a year weaker, had carried him. Using his sharp eyes and ears and his knowledge of the terrain, the older boy had guided his

stumbling brother. Go toward those trees, he would tell him, pass between those two large boulders, the descent there is easier. Somehow they had stayed alive for the remaining days of the Saving. They had never stayed in one place for more than a day, always kept moving, moving, Barra stumbling and wheezing under his burden, Donat giving directions. And together they had eluded the Elders, together they had survived. On the morning following the final night—in the light of a new dawn that meant they had survived for another six months, at least until the next trial, the next Saving of the Children—they had just lain down where they were and slept.

Donat had awakened to find his father standing over him, weapons slung harmlessly across his back rather than ready for death in his hands. The Elders with him studied the scene in silence. Barra still slept, his face in the dirt, oblivious to a rock pressing against his cheek. His father's eyes came to rest on Donat's ankle. Donat watched the man's face and knew that he understood how they had survived. His father, face still expressionless, nodded and looked at the other men. Donat saw that he was proud of his sons, this man who, only the day before, would have killed them. In that instant, Donat knew that he absolutely meant to survive his last Saving. He would live, as his father had lived, and someday he would have a son he would not be able to kill and he would look at that son the way his father was looking at him now.

And Barra would be his ally. There would be a time, six months from now, in some other threatening landscape the gathering had moved to, when they would be on opposite sides for the Saving. It would be during that short period when Donat had become a man and Barra would still be a boy. Two Savings when Donat would have to hunt his brother, as their father had hunted both of them. But Donat put the thought from his mind; it was useless, of no value at the moment. What mattered now was that his brother was an ally.

"Barra," he said, his voice low in the heavy darkness of the hut, "rest now. Later, but before the dark comes, we go out again. Are your weapons ready yet?"

"Not yet," Barra said, "no more than yours. But they will be ready in time."

"Good. Then rest now. I will wake you."

The doorflap suddenly swung aside and their father entered, tall, erect, his presence filling the interior of the hut. He looked from one boy to the other, looked at the sacks by their sleeping palettes.

"Do you rest or do you make ready?" he asked.

"Both," Donat answered.

The man's eyes came to rest on his son's face. He held his gaze for an instant, then nodded. In another second, he had pushed aside the doorflap and was gone.

Donat lay awake until he heard the rhythm of his brother's breathing ease and become more regular. Then he allowed himself to drift off again. As he slept, he dreamed of having a son he could not kill.

David DeVries had been alone for four hours.

Captain Harding had remained with him for an hour, walking his stretch of the Wall with him, talking, explaining, reminding him to step back before passing from the protection of one plastiglass shield to that of the next. The sections of the shield were five meters long, separated by gaps of two meters. The gaps were necessary if weapons ever had to be used; two men could fire from each opening. DeVries hadn't asked if that had ever been done, and Harding hadn't volunteered the information. DeVries didn't at all like the look of the gaps. The wall on that side of the platform only came up to his stomach. Useful if you had to crouch and fire, he thought, but otherwise unprotected and dangerous. He didn't know if the Melanians ever tried firing weapons of their own through those open gaps, but he doubted it; from what he knew, their most advanced weapon was the bow and arrow.

He stepped back from the shield, all the way to the rear wall, before taking the few steps that carried him behind the next section. His eyes swept out over the compound. Nothing. At least, there was nothing he could see, other than the rocky uneven soil and a dark patch of forest. If it could even be called forest, he thought; it was really just a large area of ground where

trees grew thick and dense around a water source, then, as he could see from his elevation on the Wall, trailed off sparsely into stony soil. He swung his gaze right, then repeated his inspection. Still nothing.

He made his way along the platform to the point where he had left his food kit. The captain had advised him to eat before it got dark. When it got dark, he probably wouldn't feel like eating. Probably right, DeVries thought. He didn't much feel like eating now, in the last of the fading daylight. He opened the mess kit and began eating from one of the self-heating cans. It would be dark soon.

Harding had explained how the shields worked at night. When the daylight faded to a certain level, an automatic photo-sensitive cell was triggered, and the shields that had been transparent plastiglass during the day became constant light collecting screens, magnifying the infrared spectrum and making anything seen through them as visible as it would be in full daylight. Pink-tinted, Harding had said, but visible.

DeVries suddenly froze. Does the shield work in both directions? he wondered. The thought of being so visible at night—pink-tinted but visible—unnerved him more than anything else about this assignment: It didn't help to think that the Melanians would be equally visible, should there be any of them close enough to the Wall to see him. He pictured what they would see if they chose to come and watch: himself, peering out at them from the safety of the pink shield, moving on a few paces, peering out again, disappearing past the open black gap, then reappearing to look out again from the next shield.

His eyes swept out over the graying shapes of the compound. Still nothing moved. No sign of life. It was getting darker.

The boys looked up at the Wall. A man stood there, behind the shining things at the top. As they watched, he bent over and disappeared briefly. When he reappeared, he seemed to be eating something. The two boys settled deeper into the depression between the trees. Neither of them moved.

After a few minutes, the man walked slowly toward the other end of the shining thing that reflected so brightly the last light of the day. The boys didn't know what it was, except that they knew they could see the man right through it and no doubt he could see them if they came out into the open. And Donat, who had spent many nights away from his sleeping palette in the last six months, knew something else as well.

They lay in silence, unmoving, until the man's slow passage had taken him some distance down the Wall. When he had gone so far that they would have had to shift their positions to keep him in sight, Donat moved back, then turned over to sit cross-legged in front of his brother. Barra did the same.

"I have watched the Wall for a long time," Donat said. "These men who walk on it...They have tools that we do not have, tools that can help us." He looked steadily into the younger boy's eyes.

"You know a way to get some of their tools," Barra said.

"Yes. But, to get the tools, we must first get one of the men." Donat's eyes, already dark, grew suddenly even darker. "We will kill one of them," he said, "and get his body."

"Yes," Barra said softly. "But how?"

"I have a weapon. I will finish it tomorrow. Then I will tell you my plan. And tomorrow night, in the darkness, we will do it."

"We will kill one of those men," Barra said, his voice hovering somewhere between question and promise. His eyes glittered with excitement.

"Yes," Donat said. His gaze swung toward the Wall where Trooper David DeVries was just coming back into view. "We will kill that one."

The next day was still new when Donat and Barra hurried from the gathering of huts toward where the hills began to rise and the trees grew a little thicker. Each of them carried slung over one shoulder the leather sack containing weapons and tools. In addition, Donat carried, grasped awkwardly in both hands, the stone he used for sharpening edges. Barra carried a second small sack containing food for both



of them. They would be out all day.

They fell naturally into the familiar pattern, Donat walking first, leading the way. They pressed on without speaking, into the thickest part of the woods. When they reached the spot he was looking for, Donat carefully set down the stone. They were in a small clearing formed by a rough circle of the tallest and straightest trees. From outside the circle, the open space was barely visible. Donat had searched long and rejected many other sites before settling on this one as the best and safest place to work. So far none of the other boys had discovered it. Not even Barra had been here before.

Donat felt excitement stir within him as he pulled the crossbow from the sack and laid it on the ground, then spread everything else out around it. There were arrowheads, shafts, a few feathers. Most of these he moved closer to Barra. Then he took out the barbed arrowhead and the heavier shaft that were intended for the crossbow. These he had to finish himself.

He tested the edges of the arrowhead against his thumb. They could not be made any sharper without weakening the arrowhead itself. A fine point or sharp edge that was too brittle would defeat the purpose. It had to be strong as well as sharp.

The idea had come to him when he found the oddly shaped stone. He had hurled it against a boulder many times to see if it would shatter. He had thought it would, or at least that one or more of the projecting angles would snap off. They had not. He had studied the stone for a long time, turning it over and over in his hands, feeling its weight, judging how it might be sharpened, how its angles might be refined. When he began working on it, he had to sharpen the inner edges of the barbs along the edge of the stone to get them into the shape he needed. His fingers and knuckles had bled for a week. By the time he was finished, the stone was stained with his blood. But he had what he wanted.

Then he had gathered the other pieces: the sturdy branch with just the right curve and tension to form a bow, the leg tendon from an animal that would be the string, another branch to make an arrow light enough to shoot, but straight enough to fly

true and strong enough not to snap when pressure was applied at the critical moment, and feathers large and full enough to balance such an arrow. And one more thing, a rope of softened bark, peeled slowly, with exquisite care, from the tall trees around the clearing. It was fine but strong and Donat had spent long hours staring up at the Wall, trying to calculate the right length for it. Too long and it might tangle and deflect the arrow from its target, too short and it wouldn't serve the purpose. It had to be right. There was only one chance for it to work.

The boys labored in silence until finally Donat gave the word and both laid aside their work and reached for the food sack. While they ate, Donat inspected his brother's work. The pile of completed arrows was growing. Donat praised them briefly around a mouthful of food. Barra nodded solemnly.

"These arrowheads here," Donat said, picking up a handful from near his brother's scabby knee. "These are less good?"

"Yes," Barra said. "Those I will do last, with the weaker shafts."

"Do them now," Donat said. "With the shafts that are poorest. We have good use for them. They need not fly perfectly straight." He sighted along the shafts one after another, rolling them between his fingertips. "Yes," he said. "These will do. All we need is that they fly, and they will fly only once."

"Those arrowheads are not fully sharpened," Barra said.

Donat allowed himself a half smile. "They are not meant to stick in anything," he said. "They are only meant to hit something."

By the time Donat finished with the crossbow and the one arrow meant for it, shadows were beginning to lengthen across the clearing. Barra had completed seven of the poorer arrows.

"Finish that one and then stop," Donat said.

He began picking up the remaining materials and putting them into the sacks. By the time he was finished, Barra was ready to hand him the last of the completed arrows. Donat added it to the others.

"It is later than I planned," he said, and stood up.

"What of this?" the younger boy asked.

"That we will use now," Donat answered. He bent down and picked up the crossbow, the one special arrow, the rope. Beside Barra's feet were his bow and the seven arrows made from the weaker materials.

Donat waited while Barra hid the sacks beside a tree at the edge of the clearing. When they were safely out of sight, he instantly turned away and stepped into the woods on the opposite side of the clearing. Ignoring the dull throb in his ankle, he slipped quickly between the trees and over their gnarled roots.

He looked back only once. "Come," he said. Barra followed closely behind.

DeVries was beginning to feel at home on the platform, at least during the daylight hours. It was only his second day, but his eyes were growing accustomed to scanning the alien landscape where nothing ever happened. His feet were getting used to standing and walking all day.

The only thing that bothered him was the dark.

The night was almost total in its blackness. The thin yellowish light from Melania's single moon was not enough to fill the shadows in the landscape and only made the natural contours and irregular shapes more mysterious, more vaguely threatening. DeVries had spent the previous night, his first, shivering with goosebumps.

The plastiglass shields, with their odd pink color, had not helped. Rather than making him feel he was safely looking out at whatever lurked in the landscape, they gave him the feeling that he was on display, like a fish in a tank. And that, somewhere in the darkness, invisible oddities watched him.

He glanced at his chronometer. Less than half an hour of dreary daylight left. He sighed and moved further along the platform, then stopped near the other end of the shield, gripped the railing with both hands and pressed his forehead against the glass.

It was far too late to change his mind now, of course, but doubt still nagged at him. Was it worth it? That question had hovered at the back of his mind all through his training, as it had with all the enlistees. The

Service knew, of course, and kept them so busy, in the classroom and in the field, that there was hardly time to think about it consciously. But it was there nevertheless. Five years was a long time to sign on for. A lot could happen to a man in five years, he could change in so many ways. And a lot could happen to the family he'd left behind. Now, on the platform, with only the darkness for company, the loneliness took him again.

While his gaze roved across the darkening landscape, DeVries fumbled inside the open collar of his blue uniform shirt. His fingers found the chain, hooked it, and pulled out the dogtag. In a second, he had opened the chain and the dogtag lay in the palm of his hand. It wasn't, strictly speaking, the regulation kind, but the store at base camp did a huge business in them. He wasn't the only enlistee who wanted to carry something private with him. His fingers sought the tiny hidden catch and the dogtag instantly split open like a book.

Inside were two holographs. On the left was a picture of his wife. She smiled out at him from the holo, tossed her head, hair flying in an invisible breeze, smiled patiently at the camera again. Then the picture winked out for an instant and the cycle started over again. Remembered laughter echoed in his thoughts. He fought back a lump in his throat. It had been a long time.

In the right half of the dogtag was a holo of himself and the two children. Karen was still a baby, small enough to be held in her father's arms for a picture. But Robbie was nine. At least he was nine at the time the picture was taken; he's ten by now, DeVries thought sadly. The faces, including his own, smiled out at him from the tiny image. Karen squirmed against him. Robbie turned from the camera, looked back and up inquiringly at his father. DeVries saw himself look down, place a hand on Robbie's shoulder, and point toward the camera. They both grinned just before the image went white, then started over.

He wondered where they were now, what they were doing.

He stared at the tiny pictures from another world, another life, for a few seconds more. Then he snapped the dogtag closed, refastened the chain around

his neck, and resumed his slow pacing of the platform.

It was almost dark.

Donat led the way right out to the edge of the copse, where they had been the day before. They lay there only long enough for him to be satisfied that the lone man on the Wall was the same one as yesterday. The new one. The nervous one. Then, cautiously, the boys crawled back among the trees to a place where they could sit.

"These arrows," Donat said, pointing to the seven shafts in his brother's hand. "They are good for this purpose." He leaned forward, arms resting on his knees. "You will take your bow and these arrows to a place further along among the trees. I will show you where. When I leave you, you will wait the length of time it takes to walk quickly half the distance from the gathering of huts to the clearing in the woods. That will give me enough time to get into my place. When, in your mind, you have walked the necessary distance, you will shoot all seven of these arrows, one after another. Do it quickly but not as quickly as you can. Aim for the shiny things that glow in the night.."

Donat's excitement echoed in his brother's voice. "The noise of the arrows striking will frighten him," Barra said.

"Yes. When I hear the arrows striking, I will be ready with this." He raised the crossbow and lightly fitted the single sturdy shaft with its barbed arrowhead against the side of the bow.

"How can you hit him?"

"It will not be easy. The bright things will protect him. What I hope is that he will be frightened and forget to stay behind their protection. Or think that the darkness between them will protect him better."

Barra's fingers were flexing with eagerness. "You think he will fall from the..." His voice trailed off as his eyes dropped to the savage barbs of the arrowhead. "You will hit him and then pull him over."

"I will have only one chance," Donat said, his voice low and intense. "One chance for the barbs to lodge securely in him. One chance to pull strongly enough on the rope. As soon as you have loosed the last of your arrows, you must come running to me

through the trees and out of sight of the Wall, but as fast as you can."

Barra grinned. "You think he will have things we can use, things that will help us in the Saving."

"He might," Donat said quietly.

"Only a few times before has this been done. Do you think we can do it?"

"I think so," Donat said, and his voice was barely a whisper among the shadows of the trees. "If it does not work, nothing is lost but a little labor. And that counts as nothing compared to our lives." He stood up suddenly and his brother jumped to his feet beside him. "And even if the man has nothing we can use..." He stopped, his mind searching for a way to speak the thought he had been groping toward now for days. "Even if the man has nothing," he said slowly, "still, we will know what we can do."

Barra nodded thoughtfully. "Yes," he said at last, "we will know what we can do."

Donat led the way through the tangled darkness again until they came to the edge nearest the Wall. When they caught sight of it, the shiny panels were already glowing pink. The Wall loomed dark, huge, blacker than the dim sky behind it. The man on the Wall had moved some distance off to their right along the platform. They watched in silence as he moved still further away, then at last reversed his direction and slowly made his way back toward where they crouched, invisible among the trees.

DeVries had hated the darkness last night and he hated it this night. He felt, with the rational part of his mind, reasonably confident that there was nothing threatening out there, nothing anywhere near the Wall. He knew, besides, that even if there were something—or even someone—nothing could get to him up here on the platform. But he still felt like a target on display.

He had stopped looking at his chronometer every few minutes. Doing that only made the time pass more slowly. The impulse was there constantly to check, to see how much longer he had to stay here before he was relieved, but he fought it back each time. And anyway, he could calculate the time roughly in his mind. So many

strolls the full length of his section of platform equalled approximately so many minutes. But no matter how many times he figured it, or what method he used, he still had almost three more hours of darkness to live through.

Something *cracked!* sharply to his right.

He swung around, eyes wide, staring. His left shoulder hit the plastiglass shield. For a single terrifying instant he lost his balance.

*Crack!*

His heart hammered at the walls of his chest. His lungs strained for air. Suddenly the darkness clawed at him with clammy hands. His wet shirt clung to his back.

*Crack! Crack!*

He swung back to the shield, straining to react the way he'd been trained. But what was he supposed to do? His mind was blank, ragged thoughts flinging about wildly in his head. The compound. Something out there. What? Or was it on the Wall itself? Coming for him?

*Crack!*

For a trembling instant he peered, wild-eyed, at the pink view of the landscape. Rocks. Trees. Tangled shadows.

*Crack!*

The communicator! He whirled around, ran three steps. Where? His eyes searched desperately along the rear wall of the platform. There! The amber light glowed warningly at him.

*Crack!*

He jumped for the communicator, knees weak, a strangled cry choking as he ran.

The barbed arrowhead struck him in the throat. His body whipped around so hard that, when his arm hit the end of the plastiglass, the force of the blow shattered the bone. The point of the arrow slid easily through yielding flesh, slicing up through his neck, severing vocal cords, smashing windpipe, spraying blood, and buried itself in the bony tissue at the roof of his mouth.

Wrenched violently backward, the barbs on the stone arrowhead tore through the soft bloody flesh of his cheek and hooked firmly over his jawbone. His head snapped sideways. His body, already off balance, slammed against the waist-high wall between the shields. It hung there for an instant, then—as if suddenly resigned to its fate—slid easily over the top of the wall and plummeted in a spray of blood to the rocky

and uneven ground below.

Donat was already bending over the body when Barra dropped to his knees beside him. They grinned quickly at each other, then looked back at the corpse lying face up between them. It wasn't safe to stay here, out in the open, but this moment of triumph was a luxury. The Elders would tell of this long after the boys had lived their lives.

"Is he dead?"

"Oh, yes," Donat answered. "He is dead."

He grabbed at one of the man's feet. Without a word, Barra jumped for the other and together they dragged the lifeless body, stinking of urine and blood, out of the open and into the safe darkness of the trees. Behind them, the head bounced against the uneven ground.

They pulled the body just within the line of trees and laid it face up in the shadows, but where there was still some dim light from the moon to see by.

"Watch the Wall," Donat said.

The moment of triumph was gone now. All that remained was his desire to do the work quickly, take anything from the body that he could. He knelt beside the bloody corpse and went to work. Once he hissed sharply between clenched teeth as his groping fingers slid through sticky blood. Barra watched the Wall.

Donat's hands fumbled at strange fastenings. A couple of things defied his efforts at pulling them free. He struggled with them for a moment, these odd things around the man's middle. The material felt like leather and Donat did not want to cut it, but finally he stopped struggling and sliced through it easily with his knife, cutting close to the end to preserve the longest possible piece. From the pockets he pulled whatever he could find. There was little. Only the leather thing from around the man's waist appeared to be useful. Donat had to hold the body in place with his foot before he could pull the thing from beneath it.

He sat back on his haunches to think. Not much. One piece of leather. He looked at the body. The arrow still protruded from the neck, its shaft stained dark with the

man's blood. At least the arrow and the rope could be retrieved. He shifted his position, moved closer to the bloody head, and began working the barbs free from where they gripped the bones of the man's face. The point was buried deep inside the head and it took several minutes to pry it free. As he worked, his fingers felt something odd on the man's neck. It was thin, hard to the touch, yet soft and flexible. Something that had hung around the neck? As his fingers worked in the torn flesh, Donat found that the thing, whatever it was, had been hooked by the barbs and was twisted up inside the man's jaw. When the arrowhead finally came free, the thing that was both soft and hard came with it.

He untangled the strange object and turned it over curiously in his fingers. The arrow had severed it, leaving two ragged ends. Attached to the strand was a flat thing, half as long as his finger and two fingers in width. And thin. One side was perfectly smooth. On the other side there were little bumps raised on the surface. But it was the hardness of the thing that attracted Donat. He tried to bend it but it resisted his efforts. If it is that strong, he thought, it may have use. He wiped it quickly with leaves and dropped it into the pouch at his waist.

Barra was watching him as he stood up and wiped his sticky hands along his thighs. "He had things we can use?"

"One thing, perhaps," Donat answered evenly. "But I will have to examine it more closely in the daylight. Come. We are done here."

The boys stood beside each other for a second and looked up at the dark Wall that sliced through their world. It towered above them, dark and seamless, its patches of pink glowing at the top. Soon, Donat thought, the strangers will come looking for their companion and he will not be there. Then they will look around and think, and they will know what happened to him. And the words Donat had groped for, and found only that night, came back to his mind.

*We know what we can do.*

His eyes met Barra's and he knew the same thought was in his brother's mind. It was not necessary, this time, to speak it out loud.

They started back to the huts in their

usual pattern, Donat leading the way, but when they reached the open ground, he dropped back and let his brother walk beside him.

They strode along in silence. Now that he had time to pay attention to it, Donat realized that his ankle had grown more tender as the night progressed. He was limping as they approached the gathering of huts.

"Wait," he said, and touched his brother's arm.

While Barra stood over him, Donat sat on the ground and kneaded the sore ankle until the dull pain was eased. Then they resumed the short trek and when they entered the gathering of huts, both boys were walking straight with silent pride. For once, Donat knew, his limp hardly showed at all.

Early the next day, Donat examined the prize torn from the dead man's body, turning it over, tapping it with his black nails. The thing puzzled him. It had a purposeful and finished look that he had not seen before only in the Wall. But its nature he could not decipher.

"I cannot tell what use it was," he said with resignation. He turned it over musingly one more time. "But we may put it to some use, for our own purposes." He held it sideways and considered its thin outline. "I think it can at least be made into a cutting tool, if it will yield to the stone."

He shifted his position on the ground, moved closer to the stone. Barra put aside his materials and watched. Donat set the narrow end of the thing against the surface of the stone. Barra put aside his materials and watched. Donat set the narrow end of the thing against the surface of the stone and scraped it once, slowly, testing its resistance. Then he lifted it and examined it for marks. There were tiny bright scratches in the object. He nodded his head. A second, harder, scrape produced more tiny marks. If the strange material were indeed as hard as it seemed, it could at least be sharpened into a fine cutting edge. He scraped it across the stone a third time, changing the angle so that slightly more of the object came in contact with the surface.

Both boys jumped when the object sprang open. It was as if an insect in the hand, previously seen only to crawl, had suddenly flung open wide wings. Donat dropped it. It clattered against the angled face of the stone and slid to the ground. They stared at it.

From inside the two wings, brilliant colors shone out at them, colors and shapes that moved, that they vaguely recognized. They watched, waited. The colors continued moving. Finally Donat stretched a tentative hand toward it. Still nothing happened. His finger touched it. He picked it up. Held it with his fingertips.

Together they stared at the people inside the wings. On this side, a female looked out at them and tossed her head in a gesture they both recognized as sexual. On the other side there was a man, an Elder, holding a young one, and a boy standing in front of him.

Solemn-faced, Donat and Barra studied the moving images. Questions raced through Donat's mind, questions he barely knew how to form. Were the people somehow captured inside the thing? Could they get out? The possibilities were dizzying and it took some while of studying the object, turning it over and around repeatedly, to satisfy the boys that, whatever the thing was, however it came to be, it could do them no harm. Barra kept a wary distance, as if it might at any moment hurl stinging arrows at his eyes if he looked too closely. Donat too felt uneasy, but in some way he had not felt before. There was something that troubled him about the object, something beyond—far beyond, he suddenly felt—its strangeness, its silent threat of knowledge and power beyond his experience.

"We will put it aside for now," he said at last. "When there is time, I will examine it further." That he would do, he was certain.

Barra's eyes never left the object as Donat pulled open his pouch and dropped it inside.

Nothing more was said and they resumed work. Hours later, they stopped to eat. But before Donat had finished, he suddenly stood up.

"I have work elsewhere," he said quickly and, without another word, stepped rapidly across the clearing and slipped between

two of the trees. Instantly he was out of sight.

He hurried through the dark tangle of roots and branches, never pausing, his muscles knowing the way as well as his eyes. When he had walked for some minutes, he reached another tiny clearing in the woods, smaller than the other but filled almost completely by an irregular boulder. Its top was twice the height of Donat's head, but in a second he had scaled its rough side and squatted on the top. Around him branches swayed like dark arms but straight overhead the sky was clear and the top of the rock was bright.

He pulled the strange object from his pouch, taking care to grasp it gently by the outer edges. He had no desire to touch the people inside. Or be touched by them. They were still there, still moving. Their eyes seemed to meet his and he fought off a shiver.

The lone female on one side he dismissed after a cursory glance. It was the others who drew his eyes. At first it had been the object itself, that puzzled, challenged, vaguely threatened. But the object itself remained unchanged, exactly as it was when he had placed it in his pouch. No, he thought, feeling his way slowly toward an answer to his unformed question, it was not the object that compelled his attention. But these people... This man...

The shock, when he realized, made him gasp out loud. He brought the object closer to his face, eyes boring into the tiny face that gazed—no, smiled—back silently at him. There was no way to be sure, but he thought... His mind tried to sort out the new tumble of questions. Then, with a clarity that brought another gasp from his lips, the thought snapped into place with the solidity of an arrow striking home. This was the man he had killed.

But was he dead? Or did he, in some unknown way, continue to live here, in Donat's hand? His mind raced ahead now while a fist seemed to pound at his chest. He could not recognize the face. There was no way he could. The man on the Wall had simply been one of the strangers, unnamed, faceless. And then, on the ground, the man had been merely a mangled body. But here he seemed to live still.



And more. There were others here, living with the dead man who still lived. A female and two young ones. They all looked out at him from inside the wings of the object. Their eyes drew him. Their faces drew him.

Another wordless sound escaped him, a harsh and sudden exhalation of breath he had not realized he was holding. It was a careless noise, unconcealed from the trees around him, but instantly forgotten. These people, this man and these others, belonged together, alive or dead, they belonged together. They were a group, a unit, as he and his brother were a pair, as he and his brother and his father were a group.

He held the image away at arm's length, turned it this way and that, regarded it from different angles. As if wary of a trap, he looked once more at the outside of the object to see if perhaps now, there were something behind the people. Nothing. Again he brought the thing close to his face.

The images began slowly to seem more familiar, as if there were now more to recognize in them. Details of clothing he could dismiss. Even the slightly strange configurations of the faces seemed less odd. But still these people were...different...and compelling.

He began again. The youngest one, the one held in the arm of the man, was too young to matter; and Donat couldn't tell if it was male or female. He studied it for a moment, watching it squirm in the man's arms, then dismissed it. And the other, the...boy. Donat looked more closely and it was as if he were seeing that portion of the image for the first time. The boy turned, looked up at the man, looked out again into Donat's eyes. Donat stared. Here, it was here, the something that was puzzling him, troubling him. He looked to the man's face. The father's face. For a moment, he thought the idea without realizing it.

The father's face. The father. Boy and father. Son and father. Man's hand resting lightly on boy's shoulder.

Donat tore his eyes away, looked for a long while upward, past the grasping arms of the trees, past the fluttering leaves—quivering like something inside himself—and stared up at the clear sky, at the unformed and wordless ideas, tangled and bewildering, that hovered just within his searching grasp for one flickering instant,

and were gone like an unseen breeze the next.

He looked back at the images. They moved as they had before.

Boy. Man.

Son. Father.

Man's hand on boy's shoulder.

Still moving, silent, their eyes met his.

Finally, when the shadow of a branch touched his knee, Donat carefully replaced the alien object in his pouch. He climbed down from the rock, suddenly mindful of his stiff ankle, and made his way between the trees. But this time he moved slowly, cautiously, eyes cast downward, carefully picking his way among the tangles of the roots.

He had lost an afternoon. He gave no explanation to the searching looks of his brother, but he worked all the harder for the rest of the day. Only seven days remained now to make ready for the Saving.

The days passed quickly as dawn succeeded dawn. Donat and Barra worked in the clearing, testing bows, arrows, testing themselves. Silent and self-absorbed by nature, they grew into mute stones, bent over their work.

The labor on weapons alternated with long walks and runs across the dry stretches of land, with its wildly scattered rocks, followed by slower progresses through the murky forested areas. They would have to use both if they were to live through the ten days of the Saving. The dry rocky areas provided trackless stretches that would leave no sign of their passing. The forest offered food and water. They would, as much as possible, move back and forth between the two. Donat showed his brother some of the other places he had found and stored in his mind, places with good protection, good vantage points, a variety of paths for flight. This part of the preparation was even more important than the weapons. Killing an Elder was only a last resort in the Saving. The rule made sense. The Saving itself was intended to produce Elders, Elders who were the hardest, the most inventive, the ones with the best and quickest judgment. A boy could kill an Elder only if he judged that to be the only

way of escaping death himself. And the responsibility of judgment was part of the Saving too, part of its test of manhood. If a boy survived by killing an Elder, he would have to answer to all the remaining Elders for his action. If his account smelled of fear or misjudgment, or if such were known to be the case, he would still die, as unfit to live and make further judgments. But a boy who preserved his own life in the mortal confrontation with an Elder, a boy who had the nerve to think both quickly and accurately, would be praised later on when the tale was told. One who judged well in action could judge well in leisure.

So good lungs and sturdy legs, and a close knowledge of the land, were as necessary as finely fashioned weapons. During the final days, Barra complained once of tiredness and, panting, asked his brother to stop.

"Will you stop to rest when the Elders are close behind?" Donat asked.

And they trotted on, to the next cave, the next tree, the next place of concealment. For ten days they would have to live like this, hiding, running, finding food, while the Elders sought them out. Donat increased his pace and Barra, breathing heavily, kept up, matching his limping brother step for step.

Two days before the start of the Saving, Donat led him to the hill that marked one of the outer boundaries of their land for this season. By the time of the next Saving, their people would have moved on elsewhere and none of this would matter, but for now their lives depended on it. They went halfway up the steep slope, then turned to look back at the mottled land, gray-white rock and lurking forest, below. The hill marked the end of their world. Beyond this point they could not go, and it was important to see it in relation to other features of the land. During the Saving, men would be posted here lest any of the boys think to save themselves by going beyond the permissible limits. If any did, he could not return. The land once left behind was closed forever.

Donat said nothing about it to his brother, but his ankle pained him constantly now. Often he would go off by himself and massage it, watching it carefully to see how the swelling varied. At one

moment it would send a burning arrow through his leg and foot, at others the pain was dull and round, like the trunk of a tree, but aching, aching. He twisted the ankle back and forth, testing for pain, for kinds of pain, learning what to expect, and inuring himself to the hurting.

And he thought of Barra, whom he would help if he could. But if he could not, he would not. Nor, he knew without anger, would Barra give up his own life to save him. There was no question of sacrifice, no hope or thought of love. Barra was older now, one Saving closer to his own survival; he would be less willing to risk it now. One had to survive the Saving; one used the means at hand. Donat, if need be, would use Barra. Barra would use him. And each knew the other's thoughts.

Increasingly, as the time of the Saving grew near, Donat sent Barra on lengthy runs by himself. While the younger boy was gone, Donat forced himself to rest the aching ankle. He knew from experience that the running and exercising would help to keep it limber, but there was also a point where further straining would only weaken it. When, for a second day, he felt the pain noticeably increased, he sent Barra off on a run that would keep him away until dark. And while he was safely by himself, nursing his ankle and yearning toward strength, Donat thought.

The alien object had never left him since the moment he had first torn it loose from the dead man. Its brilliant colors flickered past his startled eyes in the gloomy, shadows of the forest, gleamed at him in the darkness of caves. And the faces, the strange alien faces—benign now in his conscious thoughts—hovered threateningly in his dreams.

He had learned, through careful handling with cautious fingers, how the lock worked. He kept the thing closed now in his pouch. Each time he took it out and, breath held taut, sprung it open, the people inside seemed to leap out at him, as if they had been waiting for him. And sometimes too he felt that he had been waiting. But for what he could not tell.

He ignored all but the boy and man now. Son and father. Hand on shoulder. Silently, though never ceasing in their movements, they called out to him, shouted alien words

in colorful silence, in a language beyond his hearing.

Through the days of preparation they were with him.

Kalik was blind and, so all men said, the eldest of the Elders. On the first morning of the Saving, he was led slowly, reverently, from his hut into the center of the gathering, which had been swept clean of all debris. The oldest men of the village, wrinkled, gray and gnarled like the branches of a withered tree, sat in a circle. Kalik, blind and breathless, was helped to his place among them.

Behind the circle stood the others, men of middle years and younger, some only recently past their last Saving and proud in their deep-breathing life. Some of these were exhilarated at the thought of being the pursuer rather than the pursued. They welcomed the hunt. The older men welcomed it too, but in a different way. They welcomed it as a way of life, a means of life, welcomed it with hope for their own sons, in some cases doubt, but in all there was the knowledge that from the Saving would come the strength of all. The women of the gathering stood in small knots far back from the circle of young men. Their faces were hard and hopeful.

Shabar, the father of Donat and Barra, squatted in the dust outside his hut, drawing idle cross-hatched figures in the dirt at his feet. Later he would be busy, one of those who led other Elders in the hunt.

Inside the hut, in its heavy gloom, Donat and Barra sat in anxious silence. Donat massaged his ankle. Barra flexed his fingers, open, close, open, close. They avoided each other's eyes.

In the clearing, the number of men grew. Kalik nodded his head to some unheard rhythm.

Shabar rose from the dust and pushed past the doorflap into the hut. The boys scrambled to their feet. The man studied them, Donat first, then Barra, from head to foot. Fine strong sons: Donat could read the thought in his father's eyes: They would not disgrace him. Shabar's eyes lingered on Donat for a moment, held, then dropped, glanced—so Donat thought suddenly, with a shiver he struggled to conceal—at his

ankle. Then the eyes of son and father joined again in one gaze. The father took a step forward. For the briefest of instants, he touched Barra, barely the tip of a finger brushing the boy's arm. Then the hand rose—Donat thought it was like the flight of a distant bird, so slowly did it seem to move—and hovered, settled for the duration of a breath on his shoulder, then was gone. Without a word, Shabar turned from them and left the hut.

Donat stood still, his hand touching his own shoulder where his father's touch still warmed it. The hand of the father on the shoulder of the son. The touch of the father... He lowered his hand to the pouch at his waist, clutched it, fingers searching through its thickness for a hard shape inside.

His voice was hoarse when he snapped at Barra, "Come, it is time."

They were among the last to take their places inside the circle of old men.

Two Elders came forward from the huts, carrying between them a large mud-colored bowl. They struggled under the weight, trying to conceal the strain, but it showed clearly in the tautness of arm and neck muscles. Behind them followed another man carrying an identical bowl, but this one empty. The two men set the heavy bowl down in front of Kalik the blind man, and the empty bowl was set beside it. The heavy one was filled with pebbles.

In a moment, the old man at Kalik's right would give the signal and the boys would be on their own, fleeing for the wild and treacherous land around the gathering. The men would remain here, in the clearing, within sight of each other, with the women in view around them. No one must see which boys went in which direction. Long custom had taught that an unscrupulous father might take care to go in a direction opposite to that taken by his own son. So they would stay in the clearing, silent, while the boys ran. When the last boy had disappeared, Kalik would reach into the first of the bowls and pick up a pebble. Moving with his familiar aged slowness, he would raise the pebble and drop into the empty bowl. All would watch him do it. Then he would reach for another and—slowly—add it to the first. And when all the

pebbles had been transferred from the first bowl to the second, the hunt would begin.

The man on Kalik's right took the blind man's hand and placed it on the edge of the first bowl. Kalik moved his hand slowly around the edge, feeling the shape and size of it, then rested the palm on the surface of loose pebbles. He nodded. The old man on his right raised one stiff arm.

The boys fled, heels kicking dust. In a moment, the sound of running feet was lost to even the sharpest ears.

Around the clearing, heads were raised, eyes sought Kalik. He picked out a pebble, lifted it, rolled it between trembling fingers, dropped it. The only sound in the clearing was a hollow rattle in the empty bowl.

Donat and Barra headed for the clearing. The weapons were stored there and a very little food. There was no rule against taking food beforehand and hiding it. There was no such rule because there was so little food. If a boy could save from his normal allotment a little that might be used later, that was his business. Survival required a constant habit of thought, not reserved only for the time of the Saving.

"Kalik will be done with the pebbles soon," Donat said.

"Yes."

"We should move, go elsewhere."

But they stood a moment longer. Once they moved, it would begin.

"Do you have the thing from the dead man?" the younger boy asked.

Donat's hand went to his pouch, fingers groping in sudden fright. But it was there.

"Yes," he said, and stopped himself from asking Barra why.

"Good," Barra said, and picked up his sack.

Donat whirled and stepped into the darkness of the trees.

They could stay in one place briefly, but wherever they stayed, the most important thing was watching for the Elders. Most of the boys who were new to the Savings, the youngest of them, chose the forest. If food were to be found early, it would be found there. But of course the Elders knew this too, and many a boy who could not think beyond the needs of his stomach had not lived past the first day.

Donat chose a long route through the forest, heading for the rocky wastes beyond. Each of them carried a sturdy branch, easily picked up and easily discarded. It could have many uses in the forest. Before the light of day, what little filtered through the trees, had completely faded, they had use for the sticks. An animal, a small, black, wormy thing that hissed, ran at them from behind. But their ears, acutely ready for the slightest movement around them, heard its sound. Sticks stabbed downward repeatedly and in a moment the thing lay dead and bloody at their feet.

They ate it there. Barra took it apart with his knife, but soon they could separate pieces by pulling at it with slippery fingers. The meat tasted foul and dead already, even as the fresh blood dripped from it, but they ate it all and wiped their mouths with sticky hands and then moved on. There was a place with a cave where they could sleep the night and nearby, a ledge where they could watch by turns for the father who would kill them.

Ten days.

For the first two, they stayed in the cave. The ledge afforded a view, in most directions, for the distance a man could walk in the time from dawn till midday. It was protection enough if a boy was careful to mistrust every shadow, to watch in all directions at once. For two days they saw nothing. On the morning of the second day, Barra went out to seek food. He came back with a tiny animal no bigger than his own hand and a fistful of twigs they could suck for moisture. They ate nothing else that day. By evening, the hunger pains could almost be ignored. They took turns sleeping and watching. They had both known boys who died in the night.

Barra stirred from his watch and looked up at the sky to check the height of the sun, then climbed down toward the cave mouth to wake Donat.

The older boy was sitting just inside, his back against the wall. He held the dead man's object in his hands, just held it in one cupped palm, and looked at it. He jumped when Barra's shadow fell across his face.

"It troubles you," the younger boy said.

"Yes." Donat spoke the word without realizing it.

"Does it frighten you?"

Donat looked carefully at his brother, measured the frown in his forehead, the tone of his voice, the angle of his chin.

"No."

The tiny figures moved in Donat's hand.

"Do you know why it troubles you?"

Donat thought for a long time before he answered.

Donat put the thing away and stood up. "No one watches," he said, and moved toward the ledge. He was limping.

"Your leg hurts," Barra said softly.

"I put weight on one leg to save the other," Donat answered. But they both knew he was lying.

By the fourth day, they had changed locations twice. Elders had been seen from the rock ledge. They were not moving toward the cave and would probably pass some distance away, but Donat and Barra moved on. It was also necessary to avoid meeting any of their counterparts, who might well have been sighted by the Elders. Donat trusted none of the others to elude their pursuers and leave no trail.

Even when he slept, Donat was alert. Barra was a year younger, a year less experienced, a year less daring. With his life at stake, Donat trusted only himself.

By the fifth day, they had seen Elders twice, seen other boys, usually alone although once they saw a group of three.

Fools, they agreed. Too many.

But only one more than we, Donat thought, and carefully avoided looking at his brother. And wondered if Barra were thinking the same.

They were spotted by the Elders once, on the sixth day.

They were making their way back toward the rocky land after an early morning trip to the forest in search of food. The band of Elders—Donat counted six—was making its way parallel to the edge of the forest, hoping that way to cover both forest and open land. Donat and one of the men saw each other at the same instant through a long natural corridor of trees. Donat spun around, his arm striking Barra

in the chest. Like animals of the forest they ran, sprinting where there was clear space, leaping across logs and twisted knots of roots where they had to. Branches whipped them across the face. Here, after so many exhausting days in the half-light of the woods, they could fly, rely on their muscles, eyes, feet, to find the way. They sped between the trees like shadows themselves, Donat leading on the trackless path. He twisted, turned, changed direction, but always the ragged path led where he intended. When he dove at last for the hollow trunk of the tree, Barra, knowing it just as well, landed lightly beside him.

They squatted inside the trunk, close together, where there was barely room for one. They waited, eyes darting out between the leaves of undergrowth. Now that they had stopped running, Donat felt trapped. It was the safest course, he knew, and the tree had been discovered neither by Elders nor other boys, but it was these moments he hated most in the Savings. Not the nearness of danger, the possibility of death only moments away. What he hated was that the ending was no longer his to make. He had now pitted his knowledge and speed and wits against the others. If any among them could match him, that one could find him.

They heard a voice, then heard it again, closer. The Elders must have seen the direction in which they disappeared. But did they know exactly where? No, Donat thought, not if they were talking. He fingered the bow, wedged in tight now against his leg. Could he use it? Should he? No, not against that many. It would surely cost their lives, now or later, to kill even one. He tried to settle further into the trunk, tried to ease his breathing. He hated this, hated this waiting, hated leaving the outcome in another's hands.

Then they could see the men. One. Another. And another. Inside the trunk of the tree, Barra found room to squeeze closer to his brother.

But the men passed by, looking in every direction but missing the split in this tree trunk, hidden beneath leaves and branches, invisible though only the length of two tall men away.

The boys stiffened in the same instant, Barra's bony shoulder digging suddenly into Donat's side. One of the men was Shabar.

They had a good view of him for several seconds as he passed, walking slowly, eyes searching, knife at his waist, bow in hand, ready for the kill. And then he was gone. They heard voices once more, then nothing. But they stayed in the tree, hot, cramped, unable to run if they had to but, as long as they remained there, safe. The day was nearly done when they cautiously crept out and stood to stretch painful muscles and tingling feet. Donat's limp was worse as they made their way toward the edge of the forest. The foot had been twisted under him in the tree trunk and, once settled, he had not dared to move it. By the time they reached a new cave, the ankle was swollen and painful. When they had to climb steep rocks to reach the entrance, Donat had to use his arms to lever himself up, pulling with his hands rather than pushing with his feet. Barra made it to the entrance ahead of him, turned around, kneeling, and stretched a hand down to his brother. Donat grasped it instantly. Barra's other hand closed around his wrist and Donat was surprised at the strength in it, and the confident grip.

As soon as night had settled in and they felt a little safer than they had all during this day, Donat took the dead man's thing from his pouch and sprung it open. He slid across the rough floor toward the entranceway where Barra sat on watch. He held the image out in front of him where they could both see it, and the moving colors glowed bright against the darkness. They both, by now, knew the details of the people, the strangers, as well as they knew each other.

That night, during Donat's first sleep, he dreamed of the boy in the picture, dreamed of him hiding in a tree trunk and his father, the dead man, walking by.

On the seventh day, when they started to hunt, Donat called a halt. He sensed danger, of what sort, in what direction, he could not tell, but he sensed it. They knew well enough to obey the instinct. Even if the feeling were nothing more than the result of hunger, exhaustion, the tension of seven

days, they obeyed it lest those things make them careless. They drank only a little muddy water from a stream. That evening, in the half light between day and dark, they moved on to Donat's most secret cave, one he had not revealed before this even to Barra. Only three days remained for the time of the Saving; they were hungry, tired, growing careless, Donat thought, and nervous. It was time now to hide in one place and stay hidden until it was over.

The cave was high on a slope, its entrance concealed behind a formation of rocks. The hillside was otherwise smooth, an oddity in this part of the land, its surface composed of gravel and pebbles much like those old Kalik counted to start the hunt. Inside was a large cool chamber, big enough for men to stand in. It was far from food and water, but it was also far from the gathering of huts, far from the paths normally trod by anyone from the gathering. Donat had examined it twice, secretly, while he and Barra were preparing. It was untouched, just as he had found it. He scanned the gravel for signs of footprints, any disturbance at all. There were none, and he smoothed his own tracks carefully behind him.

At the back of the large chamber, the wall was split by a fissure just wide enough for him to squeeze through. He had crawled in before and found that the opening kept going, deep inside the solid rock of the hill, sloping downward in an almost straight line. After a short distance, the space spread open a little wider and he was able to move more rapidly, though still feeling his way in the darkness. The tunnel finally twisted sharply, twice, and opened out into bright daylight on the other side of the hill.

If they could last here without food or more water for three days, it would be over. They had filled their sacks with young twigs twisted from the smallest trees. They would provide some moisture, keep their mouths from going dry, fool their stomachs into thinking they were eating.

Barra was delighted with the cave. "Why did you not tell me?" he demanded.

"Nothing is safe," Donat replied. But that night, for the first time,



exhausted from the past seven days and isolated here in the cave, so far from the gathering of huts, they did not take turns watching. They slept through the night, both of them feeling safe, slept the best they had since the Saving began, and in the morning—the morning of the eighth day—the Elders found them.

They chewed some twigs when they awoke and Donat berated both himself and his brother. They had been careless, both sleeping at the same time. Barra, apologetic for his part but feeling better than he had since the start of the Saving, said he would watch first. He chewed another bit of twig. Donat agreed. He pulled the dead man's object from his pouch, flipped it open with a thumbnail.

Barra spat out the mangled twig.

"Do you know yet why it troubles you?"

Donat shook his head in sudden irritation, a wild toss of tangled hair. Barra moved away toward the entrance and the wall of rocks that protected it. Donat looked at the thing in his hand. He had to wait a few seconds, then it was there again in front of him, the one detail that always drew his eye: the father's hand on the shoulder of the son.

"Donat!"

Barra had crawled down from the lip of the cave to the rocks to begin his watch. He crouched there now, twisted awkwardly back against one of the huge boulders. In an instant, Donat lay at the cave entrance, his body flat against the rough floor, ignoring stones that scraped his chest, belly, thighs. Barra, chest heaving, eyes wide, held up three fingers. Three men. And there was something else in his face besides sudden fright, something puzzled and puzzling, that Donat couldn't figure out. He had to see for himself. He eased himself down from the cave to the sloping ground and crawled silently to where Barra crouched. Slowly, barely moving his head, he peered outward and down.

Their father and two other Elders stood at the bottom of the hill. They were talking, not even looking up toward the cave.

Moving as quickly as silence would permit, the boys crawled back to the cave entrance, climbed up to the floor,

scrambled instantly for the fissure in the rear wall. Barra reached it first, slipped into it and out of sight. Donat followed. They edged through the narrow passage as quickly as they could. In the sudden darkness, they had to travel by feel through the rough passage. As it opened out wider, Barra, smaller than his brother, drew further ahead. Donat heard him scrape around the twists in the fissure.

Somewhere ahead in the dark, Barra gasped. "No!"

Donat reached the first twist, the second. And knew what was wrong. There was no light. The escape was closed. A narrow sliver of daylight, no wider than the thickness of a fingernail, penetrated the dark like the blade of a knife. A boulder blocked the opening.

Breathing heavily, hearts pounding at their chests, they squeezed together and pushed against the boulder. Their first effort bloodied their fingers but produced nothing. They tried, panting, to rearrange their bodies in the cramped space. Suddenly Donat dug his fingers into Barra's arm.

"Wait! They know this entrance. They may not have seen the other."

He edged backward in the narrow space, past the twists in the tunnel, until there was room to turn around. Barra followed and slowly they retraced their way toward the large chamber. When Donat could just make out the dim daylight that reached the opening of the fissure, he halted. Behind him, he could hear his brother's heavy breathing. He felt his own blood pounding through ears and temples. His arms felt cold.

Making an effort to breathe normally, and failing at it. Donat edged forward, lying flat on his stomach now, pulling himself along by his elbows. Finally, from the dark of his hiding place, he could see into the chamber. It was empty. He settled down, ignoring a large rock under his chest. And waited. Nothing. No movement. No sound.

Donat waited as long as he could, then gritted his teeth and waited longer. His first thought was that they were safe as long as they stayed in the fissure. Even if the Elders had found both entrances, they were still safe. The space was barely wide enough for

himself; none of the Elders would fit, even if they tried. If the two of them could last through three days in this narrow space, they would survive the Saving. But Donat knew he could not stay in the cave, could not wait, could not lie there helpless, could not leave the outcome in the hands of others. And where would be his triumph then in simply outlasting, rather than eluding, the hunters? And—strange thought—where would be his father's pride? He lowered his head and rested his chin against the hard knuckles of his hands. Behind him Barra stirred, then was quiet.

At last Donat could stand the waiting no longer. He edged forward to give himself room and stretched his legs behind him to loosen the muscles. Then he pulled his legs up and crouched uncomfortably, scraping one shoulder against the rough wall. His muscles would have to be fast and reliable. When he was ready, he reached behind him to warn Barra to stay where he was. His fingers touched the younger boy's face.

He pulled himself forward to the narrow cleft that opened into the chamber. Once he moved through that passage, he would have to move fast. His head reached the opening. He edged forward a bit more. Behind him Barra stirred, then was quiet.

At last Donat could stand the waiting no longer. He edged forward to give himself room and stretched his legs up and crouched uncomfortably, scraping one shoulder against the rough wall. His muscles would have to be fast and reliable. When he was ready, he reached behind him to warn Barra to stay where he was. His fingers touched the younger boy's face.

He pulled himself forward to the narrow cleft that opened into the chamber. Once he moved through that passage, he would have to move fast. His head reached the opening. He edged forward a bit more. Behind him, Barra touched his leg. Donat hissed back over his shoulder: "Stay!"

Then he was out of the fissure, his body clear of it, crouching against the back of wall. The sacks! Weapons, the remaining twigs, should grab them, pass them back to Barra. He looked up toward the opening of the cave and the patch of sky. Slowly he inched toward the entrance.

Legs ready to spring at any alarm, he crept toward the lip of the cave. When he could almost see out and down, he stopped moving, froze against the wall, and only craned his head forward. He could see the rocks that hid the entrance. Further. He could see part of the gravelly slope. Nothing moved outside. He took a deep breath to steady himself and edged closer to the lip of the cave. If he could get safely to the protective rocks, he could see to the bottom of the hill. He looked left and right. Nothing. He eased himself down from the lip. It was four long steps to the rocks.

Crouching there, he turned his head and measured the distance, the jump, back to the cave entrance. Then slowly, slowly, he raised his head until he could see past the rocks and down the slope.

The Elders were waiting where they had been before.

Donat inhaled sharply, lowered his head, made his way back to the floor of the cave. Barra stood beside the sacks. He was fitting an arrow to his bow.

"No!" Donat snapped. "No!"

"We have weapons. We should use them. I will not die in that tunnel. And I will not wait, no more than you!" Barra's eyes flashed with a bravery born of fright.

Donat's head spun dizzily. Barra's face swam before him, turned into Barra's face.

"Wait!" Donat whispered, so softly that he wasn't sure he had spoken it out loud. He had to balance himself with one hand against the wall of the cave.

The hill seemed to sway beneath him. This was all wrong. Everything was wrong. Why weren't the Elders coming after them? And Barra's face. Why was it suddenly the face of the other boy? His fingers scratched at his pouch, pulled at it, got he thing out and open in his hand. It moved but answered no questions.

Then, for an instant, his mind was clear. They had to move, do something.

"Come!" he snapped at Barra.

He sprung from the cave entrance to the ground below. As he landed, a burning arrow of pain seared through his ankle. He ignored it, leaped toward the rocks. Barra landed beside him. Donat was already

edging up along the rock, preparing to look down the slope. A second later, he dropped into a crouch beside his brother.

"They are not looking here. They are not ready to kill us. Give me your bow!"

The shining dead man's thing slipped from his fingers as he grabbed Barra's bow and arrow and leaped out from behind the rocks. The three men looked up the slope at him but did not move. He raised the bow, had the arrow aimed before his stance was even settled. He pulled his arm back, the shaft of the arrow sliding along the bow. The men watched him, stiff, eyes fixed on him, but still unmoving.

*Why do they not move? I can't shoot unless they come for me! Move! Try to kill me, so I can kill you!*

The muscles in his arm trembled. He released the arrow. It flew down the slope toward the men, buried itself in the ground at his father's feet where, in the final instant of release, he had aimed its quivering defiance.

The men did not move.

"Shabar!" Donat screamed.

Rage and fear rushed through him, making his head spin again. He whirled, frightened, confused. *Move! This is wrong! Why won't you move?* Near his feet, the dead man's object glittered. He bent, swept it up in his hand, his nails raking gravel, and hurled it after the arrow. It struck near the bottom of the hill, bounced, rolled, slid, still open, the rest of the way to his father's feet.

Donat stood, stared, gasped for air.

Shabar was examining the arrow he had shot. The two other Elders were looking up the slope. Then his father threw down the arrow and picked up the shining picture thing, turned it over, examined it. Donat, trembling, blinded with rage and sunlight, thought his father spoke a word to the other men.

Barra's shoulder suddenly trembled against his arm. The boy had come from behind the rocks to stand beside his brother. His eyes were half closed.

The Elders had been holding their weapons half raised. Now they lowered them and the movement somehow enraged Donat even more. Still his father examined the thing in his hand.

After a long while—long enough, it

seemed, for a boy to live through an entire Saving—his father raised his head and looked up the slope.

Donat squinted, tried to make out his father's expression, could not.

Shabar squatted. *What is he doing?* The man laid down his bow, scooped up a handful of gravel, stood up again. His eyes seemed to meet Donat's across the distance. Then he raised his hand in front of him and slowly, one by one, dropped...pebbles.

The shock was like a blow in the stomach. Donat felt dizzy, took a faltering step backward. The pebbles for Kalik's bowl! They came from here, from this hill. And his father, or any of the other Elders, could cover tracks as well as he could. They had known about the cave all along.

His vision blurred. Beside him, Barra made some wordless noise. Shabar was telling them they were almost dead, had been marked for death all along.

No! Donat swung around, searching for a way to escape. Loose rocks slid from beneath his feet. He fell, landed heavily on his leg. His ankle screamed at him in pain, pain worse than he had ever felt, pain worse than when he had first hurt the ankle.

His fingers clutched at Barra's leg. His brother stared down at him in horror.

"Help me!" Donat gasped through clenched teeth. "Help me! I will die standing! Help me up!"

Dazed, terrified, Barra helped him. Cold sweat covered Donat's body. Never had he known such pain. But he groped for Barra's hand, arm, shoulder, anything to help him stand before his father. He pulled himself upright, held the blazing ankle clear of the ground, gripped his brother's shoulder, leaned on him for balance, thought *I am dead*. His fingers dug into Barra's shoulder and for an instant the boy looked up at him, looked back and up at him, and in that moment Donat knew what his father was seeing.

The dizziness blurred his vision again. He thought he saw a sudden movement of his father's chin but he could not be certain. Shabar looked down again at the thing in his hand. And up again at the boys on the hill.

"Barra," Donat whispered, "come

now." He turned stiffly, clumsily, leaning his whole weight on his brother. He hobbled slowly on the one good leg back to the entrance of the cave, wincing each time the movement jarred his ankle.

"We will wait here," he said, and eased himself down beside the packs. He put one hand to his spinning head. His stomach felt sick.

They sat together in heavy, panting silence. Neither spoke as they waited through the day. Finally, when the light was almost gone from the sky, Donat stirred. With only a few words hissed through his pain, he made his brother understand what he wanted. Barra helped him from the cave, down to the rocks in front of it, and then out into the open.

The Elders were gone. Where they had been there was a rough spot in the gravel. Donat pulled at Barra's arm and cautiously they made their way down the slippery hill.

At the bottom of the slope, in a shallow depression in the hard ground, were the weapons of the Elders. They had been laid there, arrows and bows, and dirt scattered over them. Donat, holding onto Barra, let himself down to the ground. When he pulled the things free of the dirt, he saw that the bows had been unstrung. Beside the weapons, the picture thing lay open on the ground. The faces of son and father smiled out at him.

Donat wept and Barra, further terrified by his brother's weeping, wept also. The sounds they made were choking and guttural; they were unaccustomed to crying, had not cried since they were infants, did not know how. They had to gasp for air, wind rattling in their throats, making a sound like that of a dying animal.

"They're savages," Harding said. "Honest to God, they're savages." He shook his head helplessly. "What's more, they kill a man and I end up walking this duty myself!"

The new man, Collins, drummed his fingers on the railing and smiled sadly. "And I thought it would be a nice change from clerical work," he murmured.

Harding snorted. They moved further along the platform.

"What the hell is that?" Collins pointed

into the compound.

Three Melanians were coming toward the Wall from a clump of trees, a man in the middle, and on either side of him a boy. One of the boys, the taller one, was limping.

"Should we call this in?" Collins asked quietly, as if the savages on the ground below could hear him.

"No, wait," Harding said. "Let's see what they're up to; first."

The three Melanians, naked and dirty, came half the distance from the trees to the Wall, then stopped. One of the boys, the one who limped, bent forward and placed something on the ground, then stood up. The thing on the ground caught the sunlight and glinted fiercely, but the men on the Wall couldn't make out what it was. The Melanians moved. The man in the center placed a hand on each of the boys' shoulders. They stood like that, unmoving, looking up directly at Harding and Collins.

Then the man turned and walked away. The boys turned and followed him. The smaller of them stepped rapidly to catch up with the man's longer strides, but the other, the boy with the limp, walked more slowly.

Collins was asking him something but Harding ignored it.

The boy with the limp stopped and looked back at the Wall for a moment, then turned again to follow the other two.

Harding thought he was walking slower than the others on purpose, making no effort to catch up, letting his feet drag in the dirt, and thus presenting his back to clear shot from the Wall for a longer period of time. Harding thought how easy it would be to take a shot at him, or even pick off all three with one quick burst. His muscles tensed to move, then he stopped and looked again at the slowly retreating backs of the Melanians and in particular at the even slower moving target of the boy with the limp. The very easiness of the killing stopped him and, as he watched, the three Melanians—the man and boy first, then the other boy—disappeared into the safety of the trees. For a long time after they were gone from view, Harding stared at the spot where they had disappeared. He was wondering why the boy, the one

with the limp, had looked so purposeful in his slow movements, so deliberate, as if openly defying the men on the Wall to kill

him. It was almost as if he knew that, so challenged, they would not be able to do it.

## Alan Ryan

Alan Ryan was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award as Best New Writer of the Year in Science Fiction and Fantasy on the basis of his first six short stories. Since his first story was published in August 1978, he has sold to the major magazines and anthologies in the fields of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, including Fantasy and Science Fiction, New Dimensions, Berkley Showcase, Amazing, Chrysalis, Other Worlds, Speculations, Death, Shadows, Terrors, and Twilight Zone, and his work has been reprinted in The Year's Best Horror Stories.

His first novel, *Panther!*, was published in March 1981 by NAL/Signet. 1982 will see the publication of three books. A

horror novel, *The Kill*, will be published by Richard Gallen/Ballentine. Rumors, a contemporary novel (with Stephen Lewis), will be published by Pinnacle. Perpetual Light, to be published by Warner, is a 175,000 word anthology of speculative fiction dealing with the religious experience.

His reviews of both general fiction and science fiction have appeared in the New York Times Book Review, the Los Angeles Times Book Review, Galileo, Galaxy, Thrust, and Science Fiction Times. He has also been a Contributing Editor and book reviewer for a major men's magazine.

## Sea Change

I feel light as a handful of air,  
My moonbeam bones frame sea mist,  
I am nothing but glitter and the tang of salt.  
Tie me down! Chain me to these slippery stones.  
The cry of a passing gull could carry me off,  
Scatter me like rain across the water.  
The waves sigh as they lap at the beach.  
They say there is no place but this.  
I will breathe deeply of night and the stars,  
Break this leash of reason  
Shed this harness of appetite  
And yield, unbodied, to the tide.

—James Patrick Kelly

**David R. Bunch**

---

**writer's  
workshop  
stories**

---





**Illustrated by James R. Odbert**

**T**ake the best of old — twenty-six years old — Writer's Workshop stories and go. Pick them out of the steel file cases furtively, stir the long years' dust quietly, when she's at work. Then fix back so she won't know, at a certain hour start fixing back, and when she comes home just be sitting with my blue retirement stare to meet her old wife's glares, there at the ping-pong table that takes up so much of the main room now in our rented five-room apartment in south St. Louis, Missouri. Plans plans plans. . .

But I knew I couldn't leave any of my "children" behind permanently, not a one of them. So I'd arrange for a neighbor (my beautiful neighbor across the street????!! the one I'd been watching, worshipping for so long) to forward them to me, what ones I couldn't take in my backpack. YES! Package them neatly, tightly, in a strong box, cover that over with the stoutest wrapping paper I could find and secure all with reliable string. Then my name should go on and the forwarding address next, which I think should be the ancestral farm! (Where else to go, finally, but back to where it all began?) Then I'd like to coat all in a cover of clear amber shellac — paper, string, my name and address — the package in its totality to be like some exciting four-cornered egg with a clear amber shell. Then to place it all some clear-bright morning at the bus stop, by the side of my beautiful neighbor's red shoes where she stands in her exciting tall ankle-strap high-heels waiting for something more, I've always thought, than just a ride downtown. And who wouldn't be, if married to some muscular moving-man clown whose job it is to transport furniture? — (Why have I waited so long to make my move?)

But I'm making it now! my box-like egg and I, down to the bus stop. Bashfully, self-effacingly, I'll go up in that clear cool morning light, my egg under my arm. "Here, would you, I mean, could you — would it be too much — excuse me — trouble for — ?" God! I don't even know her name. All these months of worship, and so little of her do I know? Lenore! Her name could be Lenore. Oh, I hope so — such a beautiful sad tragic name for such a beautiful sad tragic lady. Sad? Tragic? Well, wouldn't you be, if your true meant and heaven-sanctioned love was just across the street, but kept back month after month after month by lack of punch and push by me, and the presence of a dumb muscular moving-man dummy husband whose job it is to baby-sit old used household goods across the country on short hauls and long?

"Lenore, please, my darling, take my egg, keep it for me and mail it to me after two and one-half-moons have gone past from now-time, will you, my darling, can you, my sweetheart?" (And remember, I had never spoken a word to her before in all my natural-born, anxious, worshipping, fool's life — darn me. Not even here in this time-luxury of nothing-I-have-to-do early retirement, with all the free time in the world. . . )

"Oh yes! I can! I will!" she would breathe back, the Dolly Parton things upping and downing, upping and downing! as she breathed to my quavering query her sweet positive reply, and, trembling just a trifle, she would maybe send ripples like little junior waves throughout the long blond hair so carefully arranged.

Then perhaps there would be just time for her to touch my egg lightly, barely flick it with the toe of a high-scarlet ankle-strap shoe, preparatory to asking, "What" — the juggling up and down going again with those big twin Dolly Par-

tons, "is it?"

And I would answer, "Dreams," just that, taut and no adding, as I breathed hard myself, due to nearness to all that I have dreamed for and watched at and longed after and once by it was waved to (I think) as I stood high on my third-floor balcony porch, watching this waiting standing. (From too far, always, oh God, too far.) And now it is here, right here! at touch distance, accepting my four-sided egg, my dreams, and dance-breathing those THINGS! up and down.

Then the bus comes and she is gone, the egg balanced lightly in her white white hands as she boards for downtown. We wave at each other, she rushing to the bus's back window to see me; we throw one kiss each, and that is all. Just the transfer of dreams and the perfect understanding of love with a very minimum of show and explanation. It CAN happen that way when two people have longed at each other for so long from right across the street and been kept apart by a muscular moving-man dummy furniture nurse (and the timid put-it-offness of a lover, a jackass! — darn me. Yes, I have been the FOOL. She probably has wanted me as much as I have wanted her, all along, this beautiful reticent lady, age about thirty-three).

(Our ages are not all that much different — 15! — who cares a swig, when it's LOVE?)!

Then, with her gone on the bus, I would hike west and south with the backpack stories, going home, back to the ancestral farm — but taking my time, savoring the weather along the way, moving into taverns and truck stops after dark to set up eating and drinking excursions and plan nighttimes. A middle-aged loser, almost! (I'm forty-eight going on a hundred and ninety-nine), across autumn I would go. I'd sail into the leaf-fall and October's bright blue blowing times; I'd hunt pumpkins down the line. I've always liked autumn moving! And I would think of her back there in St. Louis guarding my dreams, all the time. When I had rushed love with a pushy nightclub beauty or a demanding truck stop charmer in her need for my love and charms, I would always imagine it was SHE, the magic HER guarding my dreams in St. Louis. And the girls of the one-night attacks would just have to accept being Lenore for that brief time, because that is the name I would be apt to shriek at them from my lungs' tops as we danced our frantic bodies at each other and made our hectic young-old love at one another in handy lust time. (But for me TRUE! Straight with Lenore. YAY! for TRUE!) And there will be for me no dearth of pushy nightclub maidens and anxious truck stop waitresses seeking sex, have no doubt about that, as I move west and south with the backpack stories and tell people I am in the full process of writing a GRAND best-seller book! And I just hope she thinks of me when he is at her and with her, making his clumsy, muscular, disgusting, furniture-mover, jaded-husband-wife-type love at her.

I will expect her to intercept me along the way and down the line with greeting cards saying, "Oh, Darling," and perfumed letters shouting, "LOVE!" I will be disappointed if she does not keep me posted about how she is keeping our egg hidden from HIM, and I will be so proud that tired footsore after-dark evening when I press into that gay-lighted merry-tinkling place and the clear-eyed little bartender says, "You must be he. — Lenore?" I nod ever so slightly in a kind of

**Dear Darling.**

All my love forever and FOREVER X O  
Lenore X O X O X O X O X O X O X O

How did she know where to send it? And how did I know where to go to receive it? Love knows. LOVE knows these things. And because so many of you out there demand explanations, that is, I'm sure, why so many of you out there were never a part of a love like this, and, I'd bet, never shall be. —I awoke many hours later in the corner of the tavern at a table that was lonely, except for me, and all the tinkling and the lighting and the tune-playing and the friendly warm spirited laughter were gone, along with almost everyone, from a place that was now coldy-dark. Someone out of a kindness, or more as a joke, probably, had placed in my clasped hands, forward on the table as I slept dreaming, sitting up, a small sprig of pale lavender lilacs in full bloom, and it contrasted rather badly, I'm sure, with my Hemingway-white medium beard. (Well, what do you expect? Of course the sprig wasn't real, it was plastic. But this was autumn, you must remember. and wouldn't we more expect goldenrods!?)

**"SOON CLOSING!"** — The knife-voice Doom-spoke at my ears.

(I lurched and staggered to upstanding, and it really was autumn — October one more time; I could hear the wind raving and then falling on the roof; it was spent-leaves time.)

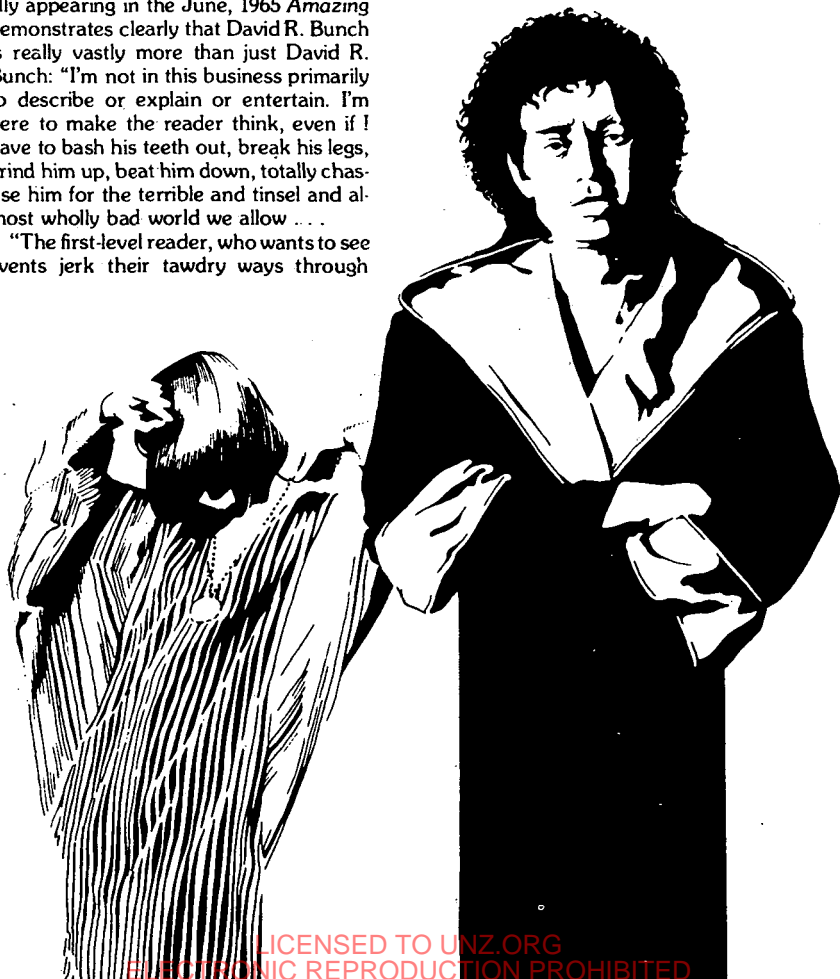
## David R. Bunch

"David R. Bunch is David R. Bunch." (Except, of course, when he is Darryl Groupe.) For those readers who might need more information, Bunch has been published many times in both *Fantastic* and *Amazing*. He lives in Missouri, works as a cartographer for the US Air Force, studies (and laments) the human condition, studies and appreciates the arts — and writes. His writings include novels (an SF novel, *Moderan*, 1971), hosts of short stories for anthologies and magazines, and poetry for newspapers, magazines and a book-length collection.

That aside, the following quote originally appearing in the June, 1965 *Amazing* demonstrates clearly that David R. Bunch is really vastly more than just David R. Bunch: "I'm not in this business primarily to describe or explain or entertain. I'm here to make the reader think, even if I have to bash his teeth out, break his legs, grind him up, beat him down, totally chastise him for the terrible and tinsel and almost wholly bad world we allow . . .

"The first-level reader, who wants to see events jerk their tawdry ways through

some used and USED old plot — I love him with a hate bigger than all the world's pity, but he's not for me. The reader I want is the one who wants the anguish, who will go up there and get on that big black cross. And that reader will have, with me, the saving grace of knowing that some awful payment is due . . . as all space must look askance at us, all galaxies send star frowns down, a cosmic leer envelop this small ball that has such great Great GREAT pretenders."



# SAGA



CAPTURE  
ACTION PACKED  
FANTASY ADVENTURE  
WITH TSR™ MINIGAMES!



## SAGA™

### Age of Heroes Minigame

Defeat evil monsters, win fabulous treasures and rule great kingdoms in a quest to gain glory and be the one hero whose memory will live on forever in the songs and stories of the ages.

## REVOLT ON ANTARES™

### Science Fiction Minigame

The people of Imirrhos want freedom, and plots are being laid to rise up and throw off Terran rule. You are based on the futuristic planet in a science fiction adventure that boils with intrigue and excitement.

## THEY'VE INVADDED PLEASANTVILLE™

### Game of Alien Infiltration

The small unsuspecting town of Pleasantville has become a target of an alien takeover of its townspeople. Can they be stopped, or is it too late?

## VAMPIRE™

### Game of the Hunt for Dracula

Putting an end to the evils of Count Dracula is as challenging an endeavor as can be imagined. It requires bravery and the willingness to take incredible risks. Based on Bram Stokers 1897 horror classic "Dracula"

## THEY'VE INVADDED PLEASANTVILLE™

Game of Alien Infiltration



For a free color catalog of other fine games and accessories write to:

TSR HOBBIES, INC.,  
POB 756 Dept. 170-74 A  
Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

FROM



SAGA, REVOLT ON ANTARES, VAMPIRE & THEY'VE INVADDED PLEASANTVILLE are trademarks owned by TSR HOBBIES, INC. ©1981 TSR Hobbies, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED